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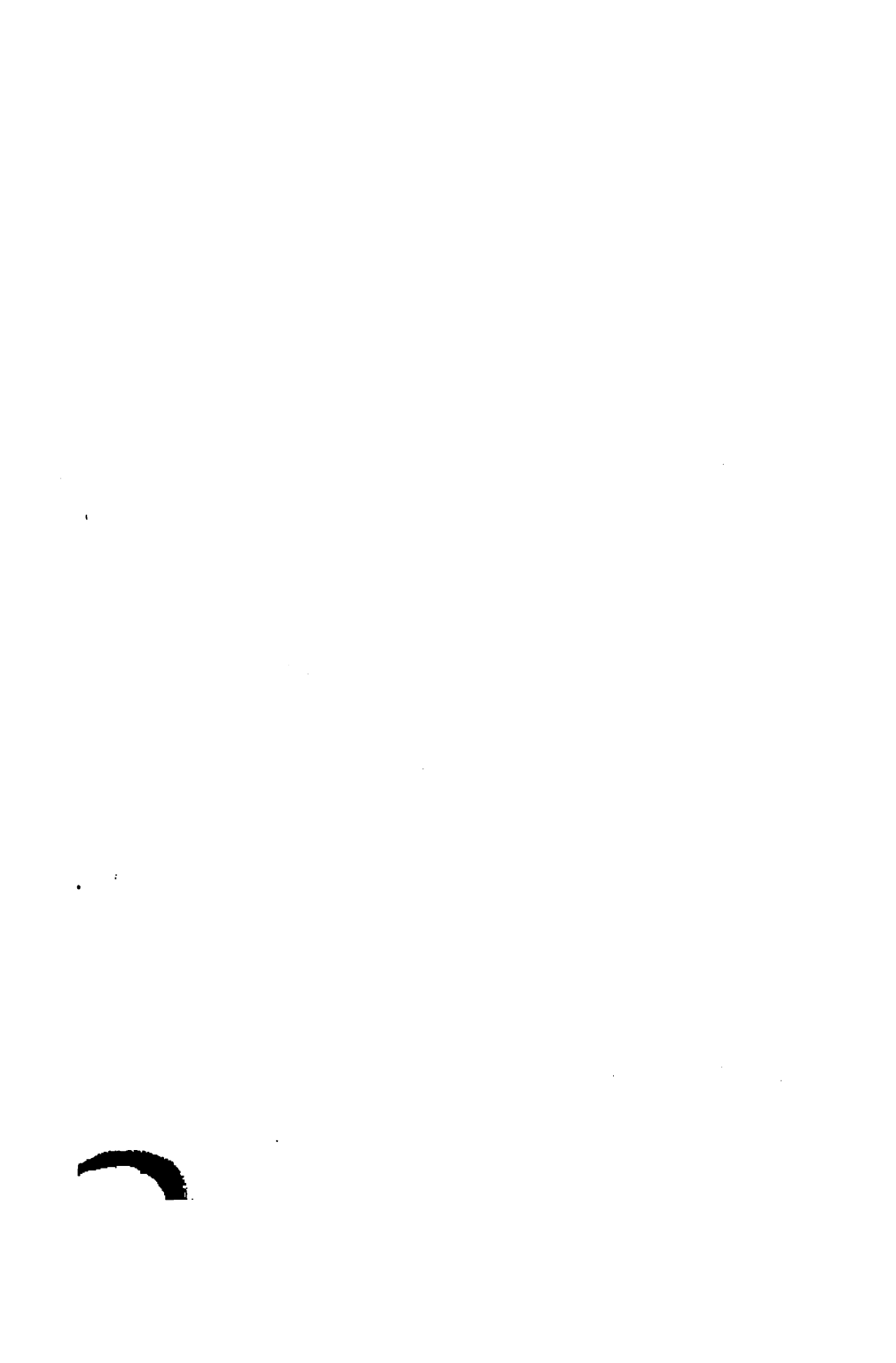
# JUDGMENT OF JANE

ROBERT WHITING



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## **THE JUDGMENT OF JANE**



# THE JUDGMENT OF JANE

BY

ROBERT RUDD WHITING

AUTHOR OF "A BALL OF YARN," ETC.

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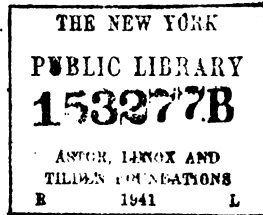
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## A SNAP SHOT

Which may or may not have had considerable bearing upon the life of one of the principal characters in this story; and incidentally upon the lives of many of the five or ten thousand men and women who compose New York's "Four Hundred."

Shortly after dawn. The sultry air laden with the heavy smells of New York's East Side. A big-eyed, white-faced little boy, leaning limply against the door of a Madison Street tenement is disinterestedly watching two mongrel dogs fighting over a choice bit of garbage from an overturned can. Their growls and yelping become louder. First one, then three or four swarthy heads appear at windows. Staccato imprecations in Yiddish. An old shoe is hurled at the fighting dogs. A stick. The curs only growl the louder. A kettle of boiling water thrown—sssst—with unerring aim. A sharp yelp, and the disturbers, tails between legs, scurry out of sight and earshot. Heads are withdrawn. The street resumes its early morning calm. Five seconds—ten sec-

## A SNAP SHOT

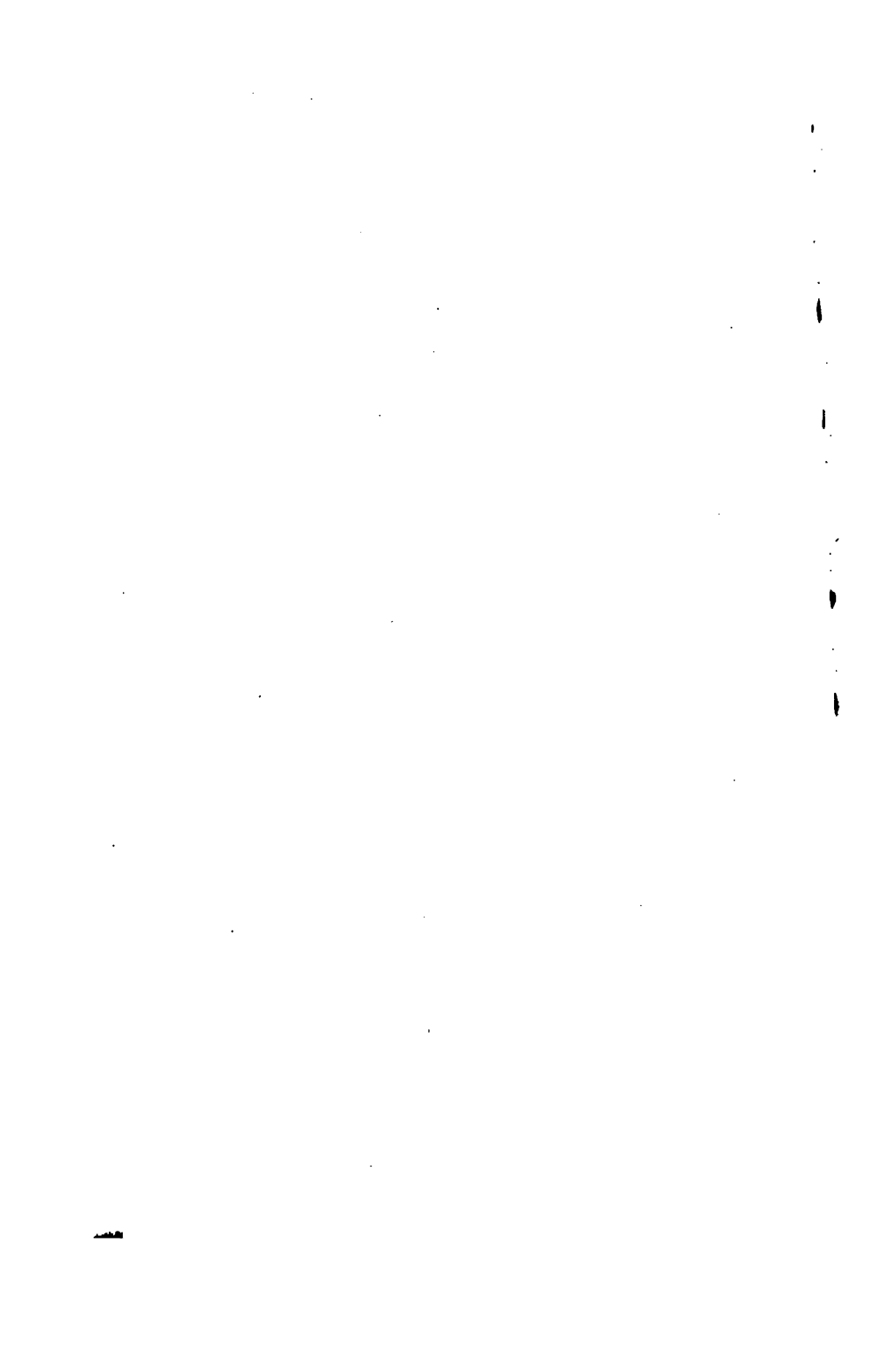
onds. . . . Stillness. . . . A gaunt grey cat slinks cautiously out of an alley and pauses. Continued stillness. She pounces upon the spoils for which the dogs were fighting, and darts back into the alley with her prize.

Admiration kindles the eyes of the boy leaning against the tenement door.

Perhaps the picture became photographed upon the film of his subconscious mind, to be developed later, long after the incident itself was forgotten. Perhaps—But here is the whole story; judge for yourself.



## THE JUDGMENT OF JANE



# THE JUDGMENT OF JANE

## CHAPTER I

**B**ERMUDIANS love to call their beautiful little group of islands "the land of the lily and the rose." Mr. Jones Bannister, with a slight shiver, inwardly christened it "the land of the chilly and the froze." It had been a windy, showery day, and the raw dampness penetrated to his bones. He was going to a tea. He didn't like teas.

He was in such an unpleasant frame of mind that it made him almost happy to find that this particular tea was just as awful as he had pictured it; the whole ground floor of Captain Archer's little white cottage was congested with finely assorted people. Tall, fresh-looking young English women with clear boyish eyes and frank, straightforward front teeth; imposing old dowagers whose figures



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had long been drawing compound interest; some garbed becomingly, others merely garbled. Good-looking young officers from the barracks; pompous old retired officers from various parts of the world; here and there a favored American—and everywhere—almost like one continuous note—talk, chatter, gabble, voices, chatter, talk. Also, there was tea and cake.

After following the line of least resistance for a while, Bannister caught sight of his host, pink and white and beaming, who surely deserved his Victoria Cross as much for the expression of huge enjoyment he was then wearing as for anything he ever did in South Africa. The captain waved Bannister a welcome over the heads of the intervening guests and beckoned to him.

As he maneuvered himself into the particular human eddy that seemed to be leading in that direction, he caught sight of the girl to whom the captain had been talking. Great masses of red hair—the sort that looks as well as auburn sounds; slanting greenish eyes—eyes that crinkled up when she laughed, and she and the captain were laughing at him now in his efforts to circumvent a richly uphol-

stered old lady who had twice unknowingly blocked his advance. At last he made it, and the captain, grinning, applauded in pantomime. He had almost reached them, when a voice from around the corner somewhere called, "O, Algy!"

"Right-o. Coming," called the captain cheerfully, and, with a hurried apology, he rushed off to assist his wife.

The girl with the greenish eyes smiled frankly at him and held out her hand.

"I'm afraid you don't remember me," she said, noting his momentary bewilderment.

"No, but I will," he assured her with confidence.

She flushed slightly.

"You see, the Captain was going to introduce us," she explained. "And besides, at English teas no introductions are necessary. Rather a sensible custom—don't you think?"

"I endorse it heartily"—meeting her eyes again.

She was about to reply, when a phonograph in another part of the house, probably as a result of the captain's summons by his wife, began to hurl forth a coon song that could be

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heard in spite of all the chatter. The girl gave a little shrug of despair.

"Are you fond of music?" she asked, a bit plaintively.

"Not enough to mind this—if you don't."

"But I do. Go greet your hostess—I think she's seen you—and then come back and find me a quiet place. I shall die unless— There, she's looking at you now."

Bannister made his way to his hostess and bowed over her hand, mumbling a few words among which "charming" and "delightful" were distinguishable.

"I saw you talking to Miss Carruthers," she smiled. "What do you think of our nice green lady? Isn't she stunning? You know I—"

She was interrupted by a dumpy little lady who attacked her from the other side with a "My-dear-I-simply-must-tell-you" that was not to be denied. Bannister made a graceful escape and drifted back in search of his green lady. He found her receiving obvious compliments from a rugged old gentleman with bristling military mustaches.

"I'm afraid you are a flatterer, General," she told him in the ear she had found to be his

good one. With a smile of dismissal she turned to Bannister. "He is a general, isn't he? Why will old men persist in trying to be gallant? He's bored me almost to extinction."

"*Distinction*, you mean. He's the Governor-general."

"I don't care what he is. Don't you suppose that if we were to slip through into the kitchen here we might find a way out into the garden?"

Captain Archer's house stood at the foot of the bay. In front of them stretched the clear blue water of Hamilton Harbor studded with cedar-clad islands. On the left stretched the Paget shore, dotted with the little white stone houses characteristic of Bermuda. On the right, beyond the majestic row of royal palms, lay the city of Hamilton, with its towering cathedral, an impressive monument to the modern Englishman's nonsense of the fitness of things. The fast sinking sun was pouring its gold through rents in the leaden sky. A red-bird darted across the picture, seeming to streak his course as though his color were not quite able to keep up with him. They stood down at the edge of the water.

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"It *is* beautiful, isn't it?" said Bannister, gazing out in front of him. He felt that the girl was looking at him and turned. She was regarding him with an amused expression.

"Nothing," she said in answer to his unspoken question. "It just struck me that, judging from the 'best seller' gallantry of your other remarks, you missed a wonderful chance by not glancing at me meaningly when you said that." He flushed with embarrassment, and then good-naturedly joined in her amusement.

"Yes, it really is beautiful," she agreed finally. "I hate to leave it."

"You are going soon?"

"Saturday."

It is said that men never notice a woman's clothes. But Bannister in some way felt that this lady wore some sort of a gray-green frock that matched her eyes, and a green jade bracelet that very pardonably called attention to a firm, white hand with long, well-shaped fingers.

"Why," he announced with sudden decision, "that is certainly fortunate for me. I'm going Saturday, too."

"Now *that* really *is* a compliment," she said,

meeting his eyes squarely. "You see," she explained, "Captain Archer told me that you were planning to stay another month at least; that you had promised to wait over for—"

Footsteps behind them, and then, as they turned, a voice: "Ah, there you are; I've been looking for you everywhere." He was slight and dark. His tightly waxed black mustaches and his quick, restless eyes gave him a foreign look. His eyebrows expressed the chronic boredom of the aristocratic Latin, or, perhaps, the centuries of patient suffering of the Jew. The faint trilling of his "r's" might have been characteristic of either.

"Mr. LeVey—Mr. Bannister," she introduced the men.

"I have often heard of Mr. Bannister," said LeVey with an exaggerated bow.

LeVey? LeVey? The name was vaguely familiar, but Bannister could not just place it.

"We stole out for a breath of fresh air," Miss Carruthers explained. "Isn't it perfectly dreadful in there? But I suppose we really must be getting back. It grows almost chilly after sundown." She gave a little shudder.

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Inside they found that the crowd was beginning to thin out.

"It must be getting very late. I wonder where mother is?" she suggested.

"She *was* in the front room with Major and Mrs. Struthers-Briggs," said LeVey, craning his neck with a show of looking for her.

"Can't I find her for you?" offered Bannister a bit doubtfully.

"But you don't know her."

"No, but I'd love to."

LeVey could not restrain a slight sniff of disgust.

"Permit *me* to find Mrs. Carruthers," he said.

"If you would I'd be ever so much obliged." Then, noting that Bannister's expression had suddenly become entirely too grave to be anything but a smile of triumph, leaning over backwards, she impulsively added, "Come, we'll both go. *Au revoir*, Mr. Bannister," she said with a mischievous flash in her eyes. "In case we don't see you before, we'll *surely* see you on shipboard."

So easily is man deceived by even himself that it is little wonder that women have to

practice on each other to make deception interesting. For example, that evening as Mr. Jones Bannister climbed the rickety stairs to the steamship agency's office to engage passage for Saturday, he was firmly convinced that he was leaving Bermuda because the dampness had penetrated to his bones; because for him "the land of the lily and the rose" had become "the land of the chilly and the froze"; because—"Oh, just because," he told himself with a smothered yawn.



## CHAPTER II

**I**T was sailing time. Negro sailors shouted back and forth at each other with the exaggerated English accent of the Colonial. The dock was crowded with people seeing their friends off, friends seeing their people off, and mere people.

Among those who lined the ship's rail, searching out familiar faces, avoiding those that were too familiar, were the green lady, now in brown save for the emerald veil pushed up over her steamer cap, and LeVey. That the latter's caustic comments on the people below him were entertaining to himself, at least, was evident from the quick flashes of his white teeth that his smile revealed, as well as from the sparkle in his restless eyes. Miss Caruthers' appreciation seemed more perfunctory. There is always a shade of sadness in setting sail from any land, even if it be to return to one's own. And then, too, everybody had been so very nice to her, and—

"There are the Archers now," she suddenly noticed. "No, no; to the left—just behind the girl with the—And there's Mr. Bannister with them! They don't see us." The Archers were hurriedly shaking hands with Bannister. With a farewell wave to them he rushed for the gangway, made it just as they were about to raise it, and—"Why, he *is* coming on this ship after all!" she exclaimed in surprise.

LeVey raised his eyebrows in polite inquiry. "And he told you that he was not?"

"On the contrary, he told me that he was," she said with a smile. LeVey gave a helpless little shrug.

"But let us see if father and mother have their things settled yet," she suggested. "They really mustn't miss this last view of the harbor—they'll see enough of their staterooms after we get outside, if it's like it was coming down."

It was while they were below that Bannister appeared on deck and searched among the passengers with the hope that one of them might have red hair and green eyes and—

"Hello, old chap"—it was the ship's surgeon who hailed him. "I heard last night at the

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Yacht Club that you were coming up with us."

"Yes. Cable. Nothing serious—just annoying. Unexpected. By the way, doctor, you don't happen to have a passenger list, do you?"

"Why, no, but since you're good enough not to call me 'doc' I think we might manage to get one from the smoke-room steward if we humored him by buying two drinks."

They proceeded to make the test.

"Your health," said the doctor, raising his glass.

"Most unselfish of you to wish it, doctor," gravely responded Bannister.

As they drained their glasses a cabin boy poked his head in at the door.

"Dr. Brown, sir?"

"Oh, lord! They're commencing already. See you later, old chap," and he hurried after the boy.

Bannister procured a passenger list from the barman and settled himself back in a corner of the divan to study it. He ran his finger down the "c's." Ah, yes, there they were: "Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers. Miss Carruthers." He was a trifle annoyed at finding out how

much difference it made to him. Mr. Caruthers? So she had a father along, too. He turned to the page opposite: "Lannigan, Lansing, Lawrence, LeVey—Mr. Maurice LeVey"—so that was why the name had sounded so familiar. *Maurice* LeVey, the proprietor of *Chat*. Bannister frowned.

*Chat* was a society weekly with rather an unsavory reputation for printing some things that were scandalous, and for not printing other things that were equally scandalous. It was the latter, according to certain whispers, that afforded the paper its greater source of revenue. Its readers, as a famous club wit once expressed it, were divided into two classes: people who had their chambermaids do their thinking for them, and people who had no chambermaids to do their thinking for them.

Its proprietor, this Maurice LeVey, was the unquestioned leader of New York's newspaper Society. He was the ladder by which climbers climbed. From the bottom it looked as though he reached to the very top. Perhaps he did. At any rate, there always seemed to be plenty of climbers willing to pay the toll that rumor said he exacted at every rung.

He lived at the most golden of New York's

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golden apartment hotels in a luxurious suite for which he paid nothing. He gave brilliant dinner parties for which, also, he paid nothing, provided that his list of guests had previously been approved by the hotel's publicity manager. So it was whispered, at least.

Personally, LeVey was most attractive. Even those who neither had use of him, nor had been of unwilling use to him, freely acknowledged his magnetism and charm of manner. He had a real appreciation of the arts, was an entertaining conversationalist, and possessed a tact that showed him the paths around obstacles he could not get over. Just where he came from—but who cared? New York is going up Fifth Avenue; does it make any difference whether or not it is going up from *down* Fifth Avenue?

But the Carruthers—why were *they* traveling with him? Surely, if they were of the New York Carruthers they had no need of the services of this courier of personally conducted social tours. The only other reason—With a scowl Bannister got up and started for the deck.

As he paused at the head of the hatch, gaz-

ing back over the stern at the bright little water-color of a picture they were leaving, snatches of conversation floated around the corner from the promenade deck.

First, the words indistinguishable, a low, well modulated woman's voice. Then: "Oh, yes, and not only family. He has wealth, wit, a charming personality—everything—" Bannister recognized the attractive, slightly foreign accent of LeVey. "That's the pity of it—with all his talents and opportunities, thus far, as he himself once said of another man, he has devoted his whole career to the taming of wild oats. His uncle, they say—"

Bannister strolled around the corner. Yes, she, too, was there, lying back in her chair with her eyes half closed. LeVey, dapper and distinguished looking, was talking to the handsome elderly lady in the chair beside her. As they caught sight of him, LeVey smiled. Miss Carruthers smiled and lazily held forth her hand.

"We saw you catch the ship," she told him with an amused expression. "Mother, this is Mr. Bannister. And my father—Mr. Bannister." A gray, little man in a neighboring

chair feebly roused himself out of his lethargy to mumble acknowledgments. Clearly Miss Carruthers resembled her mother.

"It was Mr. Bannister, Mother, whom Captain Archer told us was so distinguished that he could afford to have Jones for a first name."

"Jane!" gently reproved Mrs. Carruthers.

"He was wrong," grinned Bannister. "It was my uncle who was distinguished—so distinguished that I couldn't afford *not* to have Jones for a first name."

While the others were talking, Jane Carruthers idly contrasted LeVey and Bannister. The one was small, alert, a trifle ostentatious in his politeness; the other tall, easy moving, with a grace of manner entirely unconscious. They differed down to the smallest detail, even in the way they wore their rings. The arms on the heavy gold seal on LeVey's delicate, almost effeminate hand, she noted, was easily discernible. The crest on the quiet bloodstone on Bannister's large, firm hand was worn facing the owner. She wondered.

A trifling thing, and she thought she had put it out of her mind in the conversation that followed. But that evening, when she and Mrs. Carruthers were preparing for dinner, she

found herself asking: "I wonder why some men wear their rings with the seals out and others with the seals toward them?"

"Because," decided Mrs. Carruthers, "some men consider it most important to convince others of their family, while other men think it more important to remind themselves of their family." Then, with seeming irrelevance as she gave her hair a final pat: "I like your friend Mr. Bannister, my dear. Shall you ask him to call when we get back to town?"

It was not until the following day that Jane answered, and then indirectly. Her father and mother had gone below, frankly seasick. For a while LeVey survived valiantly, gazing meditatively out at the choppy sea, as though trying to decide whether it was the roughness of the ocean that made the ship toss, or the terrible tossing of the ship that ruffled the ocean so. At last he gave it up in evident despair. He began to look green—perhaps with envy of Bannister and Jane—and followed the others below.

"What was it you told me had called you back to New York so suddenly?" asked Jane when LeVey had gone.

Bannister tried hard to remember. What



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had he told her? "Don't worry because you can't remember," she told him with an amused smile. "Now that I come to think of it I don't believe you gave me any reason." For a moment she seemed thoughtful. Then, as though having arrived at some decision: "I hope you will come to see us when we get back."

"That was it!" he exclaimed with sudden remembrance.

"What was what?" she asked, puzzled.

"The reason I had to come back."

### CHAPTER III

**P**OLITELY assuming that the reader never had occasion to visit the offices of *Chat*, it may be said that they were located just over those of the E. F. Jones Detective Agency in a small but ornate office building off Fifth Avenue in the upper Thirties. The door opened into a large reception room furnished in mahogany. A soft-toned oriental rug covered the floor, and the pale canary walls were hung with autographed photographs of noted and notorious New Yorkers, silent warnings to the indiscreet.

When the showy young brunette at the Wingate table finally deigned to look up from her novel, she would wearily inform the visitor that the cashier was not back from lunch, or that Mr. LeVey was still at Palm Beach, or that she would send in your card, all depending upon whether, in her practiced judgment, said visitor had come in quest of money, blood-thirsty satisfaction, or mercy at advertising

rates. The perfumery that this young woman used made one wonder if violet water ever curdled.

A faint sound of hundreds of greedy chickens being fed on a tin roof could be accounted for, on passing into the large light office beyond the reception room, by a dozen or more girls busily pecking off correspondence on typewriters. Opening off this to the right were four ground glass doors marked, respectively, "Editor," "Advertising Department," "Circulation Manager," and "Cashier."

A heavy oak door at the farther end of this office was without inscription. Once on the other side of it, it was as though one were suddenly stricken deaf. The pecking of the typewriters, even the rumblings from the streets outside, were completely blotted out. There was an uncanny atmosphere of something stiller than mere silence; it seemed almost like a vacuum of sound.

LeVey sat at a carved oak table studying a typewritten page by the soft, mellow light of a yellow shaded lamp. The single window was heavily curtained with wine colored velour. A fluffy orange and white angora cat squinted lazily at him from the top of the

bookshelves against the wall. Beside her lay a violin case. Scattered through the shelves were the social registers of several cities, various editions of "Who's Who," a complete set of Oscar Wilde, Inspector Byrnes' "Criminals of America," bound volumes of *Chat*, and a copy of Rosetti's poems. A single chair beside the one he occupied, and a steel safe in the corner beyond an open fire place were the only other noticeable features of the room.

At Last LeVey looked up from the page he had been studying and ran his fingers thoughtfully through his hair. He pressed an electric buzzer that made a slight hump in the rug at his feet. The angora cat gave a nervous start and arched her back into a lazy stretch. A rectangle in the wall, not noticeable in the subdued light, swung noiselessly open and a young man appeared out of it. He was very blond, almost an Albino, with eyes like a pig's, and a habit of looking away from the person to whom he was speaking, as if ever on the lookout for someone who might be coming.

"You rang for me, sir?"

"Sit down, Mr. Skeer," motioned Le Vey when the secret panel had swung silently back

into place. "Has anything come in downstairs in regard to the Dumont story this morning?"

"Yes, sir. Gustave, one of our waiters at the Café Papillon, had him at his table last night with Hazel Martin of the 'Velvet Slipper' company. He says there isn't any question about that end of it. Go as far as you like. Mrs. Dumont isn't so certain. She was out to dinner both Monday and Wednesday, and young Mr. Davidson's valet says that he was dining out those nights, too. But whether—"

"At any rate, it's perfectly safe to run a hint paragraph," concluded LeVey, checking off one of the names on the typewritten page before him. "And now about this Jones Banister?" he questioned. "I think I have already impressed upon you my desire to—er—interest him in *Chat*."

"Nothing more than you already had, sir," admitted Mr. Skeer reluctantly. "Since that Molly Farnum business just after he left college he seems to have hit the straight and narrow. None of the servants in his clubs have a thing on him. He's gone a little gay at

bachelor dinners once or twice, but nothing valuable."

"His valet—?"

"Can't touch him. Nobody seems to know where Bannister picked him up and he's as close mouthed as a clam."

"And this Molly Farnum woman? Since she faded out of the spot-light on Broadway—where is she now?"

"Well, for a couple of years she hung around Corey's place, and then when that was wiped out she drifted down the line. We've located Big Steve, Corey's old bouncer, and I'm going to see him to-night. He ought to be able to give us—"

"Yes, yes," LeVey snapped impatiently. "You mean you know nothing. Where has Mr. Bannister been this past week?"

Mr. Skeer consulted his note book: "Monday, Morristown all day; Tuesday, clubs and call on Carruthers; Wednesday, Princeton; Thursday, motored to Greenwich and back, dined with the Lloyd-Owens, theater with two other men; Friday, in rooms most of day. Dined Carruthers. Left 10.30. Walked down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square.

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Bought out a newsboy and told him to go home. Tossed all the papers in a limousine that was waiting outside house on next block. On the way back to his rooms gave a street walker who spoke to him some money and told *her* to go home.

"Jake says he didn't seem drunk," explained Skeer, looking up from his notes. "Just sort of light-headed and happy—swishing his cane and—"

"Nothing on him at all then," said LeVey with a scowl.

"Not yet, sir, but—"

"Well, keep after him. Find this Farnum woman. And get that man of his—any amount within reason. That's all."

Skeer went out through the wall as he had come, descended the heavily carpeted winding stairs to the floor below, passed through an ordinary office door, and resumed the management of "The E. F. Jones Detective Agency."

So, thought LeVey when he was alone, Bannister not only had called, he had dined there as well. He frowned. He wondered if Jane Carruthers, wonderful Jane Carruthers who had been his dream and inspiration ever since— But the best way to find out was to

watch her when she was with him, with Jones Bannister in her own home. He reached for the 'phone and called a number.

"Mr. Carruthers?" he enquired. "Ah, yes. This is LeVey. Mr. Carruthers, I have been hoping to see more of that charming Mr. Jones Bannister who came up from Bermuda with us. Could not Mrs. Carruthers manage to have us both to dinner some night soon?—next Tuesday, say? No? Then Wednesday, perhaps? I'm so sorry. This—er—this is Mr. Thomas Carruthers, is it not?" There was a slight sneer in his tone. "Ah, *Tuesday* evening, then. I shall be delighted. Pray present my compliments to Mrs. Carruthers, and to Miss Jane. Good-by."

He rested his chin in the cup of his hand. Bannister— There was little against him so far, nothing since his little venture in wild oats in the days just after college; but every man was bad, potentially if not actually. Those who had not already done wrong had wrong in them waiting to be done. At least so Mr. LeVey had found it.

An odd impulse of Bannister's, that buying out of the newsboy. LeVey's thoughts wandered back through the years to a newsboy he



had once known, a little newsboy named Levey—Morris Levey.

Morris Levey, eleven years old, sold papers at the New York end of the Brooklyn bridge. His "home" was in a rear tenement at something-or-other-and-a-half Madison Street. But Morris seldom slept at home. His mother sublet part of their one room to another family, and it was overcrowded even in summer when the clothes basket in which that year's baby slept could be put out on the fire escape. Morris found cool relief from the blistering pavements under an arch of the Brooklyn bridge. In the fall when the nights became crisp he curled up in front of a Park Row sky scraper where the hot air, rising through the sidewalk grating, served him for blankets. Later, when the winter came in earnest, he took refuge from the snows and biting winds behind the storm door to the "family entrance" of a Madison street saloon that he knew.

Shortly after two o'clock one bitter January morning, Morris, his last paper sold, trudged over East to his storm door shelter. The saloon had been locked up for more than an hour. Once huddled up in his corner behind

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the outer door Morris was soon sleeping as only those with clear consciences, or no consciences at all, can sleep. After a while, a few minutes, or two or three hours, unfamiliar sounds, muffled and close to his ear, half awakened him. He vaguely felt, rather than saw, two men crouching before the inner door. One of them shaded a light with his hand while the other fumbled at the lock. Some instinct warned Morris to be still.

Soon fully awake, he noticed out of the tail of his eye that the hand that shaded the light had but two fingers. He was fascinated. Not so much by what the two men might be doing there at that time at night. But he had never before seen a hand with but two fingers.

The fumbling at the lock ceased. The door swung softly open. The man with the interesting lack of fingers extinguished the light and stole noiselessly through the storm door out into the street. His companion crept cautiously into the saloon.

Morris, half frightened, half curious, every nerve in his little body tense with excitement, strained his ears. For a time—a very long time, it seemed to Morris—there was not a sound. Then, just as he was considering the

advisability of slipping out into the street and getting away from the place, he heard a low, clear whistle from outside somewhere. It made him start. He felt that the wild thumping of his heart must surely be heard by the man in the saloon. He listened. Silence. Then, very faintly at first, but gradually more distinctly, came the sound of heavy, deliberate footsteps.

"Cop's feet," Morris unhesitatingly decided. The New York street gamin can instinctively recognize a policeman's tread before he knows how to count change. "An' he's comin' dis way," concluded Morris with unaccountable anxiety. But a few moments ago his one thought had been how to escape the men he had seen picking the door lock. Now all he had to do was to call for help; at least one of the men would be caught red-handed and Morris would be "solid wid de cops" for the rest of his life. But as the policeman's footsteps grew closer he unconsciously changed sides. The excitement of the game had won him over. His one fear now was that *they*—the man inside and the man with only two fingers *and Morris himself*—might be caught.

Clump, clump, clump, clump—the steps were

just outside. Morris held his breath while they were passing. His heart thumped with every step.

Clump, clump, climp, climp, climp. Morris breathed easier. The slight variation in the sound told him that the policeman had passed the curb and was on the crossing. Climp, climp, climp, *clump*—he had stepped up the opposite curb and was on the sidewalk again. Gradually the steps became fainter and fainter until they died away. Then another low whistle, slightly different from the one that had heralded the policeman's approach. This time Morris's feeling was one of relief.

After a while the man who had been working inside crept out. Cautiously opening the outer door to a crack, he whistled softly. The reassuring whistle from outside answered him. Morris involuntarily moved a little. The man turned sharply and peered into the corner where he lay. For several moments the man eyed him suspiciously, doubtful as to just what to do about him.

"Wot's up?" someone inquired in anxious whisper. It was the two fingered man who had slipped in from the street to see what was keeping his pal.

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"Funny we missed him when we come in," muttered the first one with a jerk of his head toward Morris. "I wonder—"

"Aw hell, the kid's asleep all right. Come on. Beat it before he wakes up."

A draught of cold air when they pushed the door open told Morris that they had gone, but it was fully a minute before he dared open his eyes. For another minute he lay without moving, fearful lest they return. Finally he got up and stretched his cramped limbs. He stole out into the street and looked carefully in all directions. There was no one in sight. Then, in the reaction from the strain he had been under, a panic seized him, and he ran, and ran, and ran.

Several hours later, tired-eyed and pale, he lined up with the other newsboys to lay in his stock of morning papers. He thrust his hand in his trouser pocket and—Suddenly everything seemed to go red and blurred—his pocket—a hole—when he was running—

"Wot's de matter, Sheeny?" asked a freckled faced little Irish lad. "Want me to stake yuh?"

But Morris, afraid to speak lest he would cry, swallowed back a sob and dazedly slunk

away. He plodded gloomily up Park Row, over east through New Chambers Street. What would his mother say? How could he face her without money? He shuddered. Was there no way? He had met a man once in the playground who knew a way. He had said it was easy. Perhaps if Morris— But no, that would be stealing.

While all this was passing through his mind he bumped into a man and was roundly cursed for it. His impulse was to get away, but, upon looking up, something in the man's face awakened his interest.

"Well, wot'n 'ell y' lookin' at?" demanded the man.

Morris's glance shot to the man's hand. The hand had only two fingers!

"Gimme a quarter, please mister?" whined Morris.

"I'll give yuh"—Morris dodged.

"Please, Mister," Morris begged insinuatingly, being careful to keep at a safe distance, "I'm a poor boy without no home who has to sleep in storm doors."

The man stopped short and stared at him. Morris was gazing with mock innocence at a policeman across the street. The man fol-

lowed his glance. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a quarter.

"There, damn yuh," he told Morris in a hard whisper, passing him the coin. "After this you keep yer damn little face shut or first thing ye know ye won't have any. See?"

Morris squeezed the quarter tight in his grimy fist. All the lead had been suddenly lifted from his little heart All the—

Maurice LeVey threw off his reverie with a shake of his head. The room was intolerably stuffy. He got up from his chair, pulled aside the velour curtains and opened the heavy double windows. The rumble of the streets came pouring in. He took up his hat and stick and passed through the oak door into the outer room. On his way out he stopped in the office labeled "Cashier."

"Mr. Danielson," he told the moth-eaten creature who was signing checks, "I have decided to double my contribution to The Hebrew Newsboys' Shelter this year. Tell the advertising department to make Vanderhof's contract out for a quarter page instead of an eighth. He'll stand for the raise, I think. That's all."

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE Carruthers lived just off Fifth Avenue on Tenth Street—"New York's Christian quarter," as Jane always explained to her uptown friends. On the outside it was an old-fashioned brown stone house, but the inside had been remodeled. The ground floor had been made into one immense room with the stairs opening into it, and only a huge double door separating the front from the rear, which was used for dining. The flooring of big square dull tiles made an excellent background for the soft colored rugs, just as the gray-green walls and burnt orange hangings helped most effectively to set off the gowns that went best with Jane Carruthers' wonderful red hair and white skin.

The dinner to which Bannister had been invited, and to which LeVey had virtually invited himself, was a very informal affair, the only other guest being Mrs. O'Brian, a vivacious little woman with the sort of gray eyes



that for centuries have inspired Irishmen to outfight the world.

At the table Jane was seated on her father's left, next to LeVey. Mr. Carruthers had arranged it so earlier in the day, and Jane, partly because she rather liked LeVey, and partly because she so much wanted to sit next to Jones Bannister that she did not like to say so, made no objection.

"Don't you just love this old part of town?" began Mrs. O'Brian in an effort to draw out Bannister when they were sipping their sherry.

Bannister mumbled some commonplace. "You live down here, too?"

"Oh, bless you, no," she twinkled. "We're way up in East Sixty-seventh Street just a couple of hundred thousand dollars east of Fifth Avenue."

Bannister managed to keep up a perfunctory conversation with both Mrs. O'Brian and Mrs. Carruthers, but his attention was across the table. Each time after leaving Jane Carruthers he had wondered whether she really was so very beautiful, and each time he had found her so fascinating that he had neglected to look and see. Yes, she was—really beautiful. And LeVey, with his soft, cream colored

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stock, pleated shirt and flowered satin waistcoat—

“Have you seen ‘The Strollers’ yet? Don’t you think it’s perfectly wonderful?” Mrs. O’Brien was asking him on his own side of the table.

“Bully,” he replied. Whereupon Mrs. O’Brien regarded him with mock reproach until the laughter in her eyes found its way to her lips.

“Jane,” she said, clapping her hands with delight, “here’s the most deliciously inconsistent man in the world. I’ve asked him three times what he thinks of ‘The Strollers,’ and he said ‘Miserable’ at first, then he said, ‘Yes, isn’t it?’ and now he thinks it’s ‘bully.’”

“But I thought ‘The Strollers’ did not open until next week?” said Mr. LeVey with slightly raised eyebrows.

“It doesn’t. But I could hug you for it, Mr. Bannister. You make my own Denny seem so downright attentive by contrast.”

Mrs. Carruthers took pity on Bannister in his confusion. “Have you heard from Mr. O’Brien since he left, Peggy?” she asked.

“Mr. O’Brien is away? I had not heard,” said Mr. LeVey politely.

"Yes. He said that he was sick of going abroad and visiting the same places and the same houses every year, and that he was at last going to 'see America first.' So he and Tommy Vanderhof have started off for Tommy's mine in Arizona, and I am left forlorn and disconsolate."

"He shows most extraordinary taste," Le-Vey assured her with a bow.

Bannister restrained a sniff of contempt. He mentally commented upon the latitude of speech and action that a goatee and a waxed mustache give a man.

"Oh, and the most awful thing just before he left," Peggy O'Brian told the table in general. "There are times, you know, when Denny gets acutely broadminded about prohibition. Well, he was in Cox's buying a hat. While he was standing there, bareheaded, waiting for something to try on, Mrs. Haskins—the old one who is so large for her age, you know—waddled over to him from the women's side of the shop with a box. Thrusting it into Denny's arms she told him very haughtily that after all she'd decided to have it sent. 'Yes, ma'am,' said Denny with a low bow. 'Any particular address, ma'am?' Just then the

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salesman came up with something for him to try on. 'Oh,' sniffed Mrs. Haskins, 'I thought you were the clark,' and Denny, silly idiot, began to apologize for not being. Wasn't it dreadful? And the worst of it is he thinks she recognized him."

"I've often been mistaken for a waiter in restaurants," said Bannister, "haven't you, Mr. LeVey?" Then, hurriedly, as he noted the other's expression, "But of course you wouldn't be so apt to be."

LeVey flushed slightly and quickly changed the subject. Bannister wondered.

Dinner over, they ascended to the library or music room (it served as both) for coffee. Peggy O'Brian promptly deserted her dinner partner for Jane and LeVey. Mr. Carruthers, dull-eyed and gray as the ashes of a life that had burnt out, isolated himself with his cognac and coffee in a big Turkish easy-chair in the corner. Bannister, in consequence, found himself talking to Mrs. Carruthers. An old oil portrait over one of the bookcases attracted his attention. It pictured two youths, unmistakably twins. One was seated in a curved-back hair-cloth chair. His eyes were a trifle closer together and his chin a

little less firm than those of the brother standing with his hand resting affectionately on his shoulder. Otherwise the resemblance was remarkable. At times we feel some inexplicable similarity in the most widely different people and things. Something in the fresh, clear-eyed boyish faces in the portrait caused Bannister to glance at the ashen-faced old man sipping brandy in the corner.

"You recognize him?" asked Mrs. Carruthers with something of surprise, something of pleasure. "And would you know which one?"

In response to some intuition, which, being a feminine trait, often delights in making a fool of mere man, Bannister indicated the seated figure.

"No, that is his brother, Fitzhugh," she said with a shade of disappointment. "But our coffee will be getting cold."

They seated themselves at one of the small tables. The others were at the piano in the far end of the room.

"Plain looking!" echoed Peggy O'Brian after some comment of LeVey's. "Why her looks are downright fancy!"

Mrs. Carruthers sadly regarded her husband who had sunk off into that drowsy after-

dinner state of the old and feeble. What, by the way, is the disgrace in this dozy condition that invariably causes people, when awakened from it, to assure you with such vehemence that they were *not* dozing, that they "heard every word you said"?

Mrs. Carruthers sighed. "Mr. Carruthers simply worshiped his brother Fitz," she told Bannister. "He's never been the same since. You know that strange tie that sometimes exists between twins."

"His brother died—long ago?" asked Bannister with that gentle sympathy that invites confidences.

"In the first year of our marriage—just after Jane was born." Mrs. Carruthers sighed at the reminiscence. "I never saw Fitzhugh. He had always been a wild, harum-scarum boy, and his family had washed their hands of him. He drifted south, and there he went from bad to worse. Then there came a time when Tom—my husband—had an inexplicable feeling that something more than usual was wrong with him—you know that strange telepathic bond so common between twins. News finally came that he had yellow fever—he was in New Orleans at the time.

Tom hesitated on account of the baby and me, but I knew what it meant to him—he fairly worshiped his brother—and insisted that he go. Night and day he nursed him. And then he, too, was stricken. Oh, those long weeks of wondering and worry with never a word! And then his return—the youthful lover who had left me—old with grief, broken in mind and body. For hours he would sit gazing dumbly—oblivious to everything—” With a little catch in her throat she broke off.

Jane, at the piano, had taken a violin from its case and was urging LeVey to play.

“That is my husband’s violin,” Mrs. Caruthers told Bannister. “He used to love it so! Fiddling Tom, they called him in fun. But since his brother’s death he hasn’t touched a bow to it.” She sighed and gazed longingly, not at the broken old man in the corner, Bannister noted, but at the fresh-faced lads in the portrait over the bookcase.

LeVey played, at first with due regard to the effect he was producing on his little audience, then as a true musician, oblivious to everything except his playing.

Peggy O’Brien tip-toed over to Mrs. Caruthers. “You have had her long enough,”

she told Bannister. "I want to talk to her now."

He accepted his dismissal gracefully and made his way over to Jane, sitting in the soft glow of a tall bronze piano lamp.

Peggy O'Brian, like most of her race, for she was Irish by blood as well as by marriage, was a born diplomat. She was very fond of Jane. She saw that Jones Bannister was more than fond of Jane, she instinctively liked Bannister, and she loathed LeVey with his snake-like fascination and exaggerated manner.

"I think that men and mahogany furniture should always have an eggshell finish," she confided to Mrs. Carruthers, glancing from Bannister to LeVey. "Too high a polish is so often used to hide defects in the grain."

Mrs. Carruthers smiled understandingly and patted her hand.

As the last note floated back into the silence from which he had so skillfully drawn it, LeVey turned a trifle expectantly toward Jane. She was leaning languidly back, with eyes half closed, lightly tapping the arm of her chair with her long graceful fingers. Bannister, clean-cut, confident and thoroughly Anglo-Saxon, was bending slightly toward her with



a suggestion of protectiveness. LeVey's eyes, without leaving them, seemed to travel on beyond them—far out into some dim, haunting memory. He raised the violin to his chin again, and, coincident with rather than in response to the polite urgings to continue, drew his bow softly across the strings.

The low, purring tones seemed hap-hazard, disconnected at first, like some nebulous thought, some hazy memory, seeking to formulate itself. As the soft tones assumed more definite relation to each other a plaintive minor note began to insinuate itself—a note that made the hearer's heart ache for the victim of hunger and cold; pain and misery. Just as it seemed that such suffering must be beyond all human endurance, a new theme, gentle and yearning, crept in, timidly at first as though fighting for existence, and then more and more insistent.

"Love!" murmured Peggy O'Brian.

LeVey had been playing dreamily, with a far away expression, as though he, too, were merely listening. He brought his head up with a jerk. His eyes, suddenly alive with fire, sought Jane's and held them. The violin broke forth in a frenzy of love and passion.

It plead, it fought, it cajoled. This was not music—It was hot, pulsing blood and madly beating heart—the pent up passion of a thousand years—expressed in one wild outburst of harmony.

The color rushed to Jane's white cheeks. With breath coming fast through slightly parted lips, she leaned slightly forward, fascinated. Bannister gripped the sides of his chair as though about to rise, but then thought better of it. For an instant LeVey's even white teeth flashed in a smile of triumph. Then, abruptly as it had begun, the wild harmony ceased. The violin sank from his chin, and he turned to place it in its case.

There were no words of praise. One does not applaud when a man prays; nor when he bares his soul to the woman he loves.

With a deep sigh Jane sank back, limp, in her chair.

"How wonderfully he plays!" she whispered, half to herself.

A look of tenderness for her came into Bannister's eyes. "Are you sure," he asked her gently, "that he was—merely playing?"

It was Peggy O'Brian who broke the enchantment. She glanced quickly from Jane

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to LeVey, who stood, his hand pressed against his temple, gazing at the violin as though dazed at the confession it had wrung from him.

"That was perfectly wonderful, Mr. LeVey," she told him breezily. Then, including the others: "If my Denny only cared for music! You know how he hates it, Jane. He says it's the one vice that can't be carried on in decent seclusion without annoyance to others. Painting, literature, smoking, drinking, sculpture—any of them can be practiced in quiet and solitude. Why, even kissing only takes two. But music! He says it inflicts itself upon everyone within earshot; there's no getting away from it.

"But he's really awfully nice about it. Why, I've played to him by the hour—stuff so modern that it sounded as if the piano were out of tune—and he's never even once asked me to stop."

"And you play when you know he doesn't like it?" asked Bannister with an amused smile.

"No woman can resist testing a man's devotion," she gayly explained. "It's like her taking out her jewels when she doesn't expect to wear them. They're nice to look at."

The spell cast by LeVey's brilliant playing



was broken. It was as though bright sunshine had dissipated a mist.

Too much of an artist to overdo, Peggy O'Brian found shortly that she must be going. She felt that it was the psychological time for Bannister, too, to leave. In consequence he saw her home, though, being a man, he never fully understood how it had been arranged.

"A very charming fellow," LeVey commented when Bannister and Mrs. O'Brian were gone. "It's really too bad that he—But I say too much, perhaps."

"Or not enough," replied Jane, letting her hand rest affectionately upon her mother's.

## CHAPTER V.

ONE afternoon, a couple of weeks after LeVey's remarkable performance with the violin, Jane, dressed for the street, entered the library. Her father, an opened letter in his hand, sat gazing with glassy stare out in front of him. As he became conscious of her presence he gave a slight start and shoved the letter in a side pocket.

"Going out, my dear?" he asked, dully surveying her.

"Yes. Mr. Bannister is coming to take me to the Claremont. Mother was feeling a bit fagged and asked to be excused."

Mr. Carruthers frowned. "But—" Something reminded him that he had not withdrawn his hand from the pocket in which he had put the letter. He did so now. "But Mr. LeVey is coming this afternoon, and"—his glance wandered uneasily to a distant corner of the room as though seeking the remainder of the sentence. "Jane," he resumed, clearing his throat, "LeVey is a very dear friend of mine.

I should not like to have you do anything that might offend him."

Jane waited patiently. There was little sympathy between her father and herself. Such affection as she felt for him was as the husband of her mother whom she worshiped.

"I had hoped," the old man went on, doubtfully feeling his way, "that some day—er—You know LeVey is very fond of you, my dear, and—er—"

"Are you trying to tell me that you wish me to marry Mr. LeVey?" she asked with icy calm.

"Why, I hadn't exactly intended to put it as bluntly as all that, but—Well, and why not? Why not? Maurice LeVey is a gentleman of wealth and position. He is charming, clever, and"—catching a dangerous gleam in her eyes—"it would mean a great deal to me and—your mother—yes, it would mean even more to your mother. She wouldn't ask it for herself. She wouldn't even admit it," he hurried on, fidgetting nervously. "She would rather bear any disgrace, any shame—I can't tell you; I have no right to tell you—than ask you to sacrifice your heart for her. But if—I had hoped, my dear, that you might really grow to care for him, and—"

"What do you mean?" she demanded, arms taut and fists clenched with anger. He shrank back before the fire in her narrowed green eyes. "What do you mean! Are you insinuating that there is anything on earth—except *you*—that my mother need be ashamed of! Do you—"

"Sh-h," he warned with an anxious gesture. "Your mother will hear us!"

"And she shall hear us!" she blazed with a stamp of her foot. "She shall—"

A discreet cough called attention to the butler standing between the portières.

"Mr. Bannister, ma'am."

She drew a deep breath. The catch in her throat subsided and the fire died out of her eyes.

"I will be down directly," she told the servant wearily. Then, with a glance of withering contempt at her father, she left the room.

She glided languidly forward to greet Jones Bannister, quite as though she were without a worry in the world.

"Hello, 'J.' " She had explained to him one afternoon when they were at the Ritz that she didn't feel she could ever know any man well enough to call him 'Jones'; that 'J' was the

very most of it she could bring herself to, for a while, at any rate. "I'm awfully sorry, but Mother isn't feeling up to going with us, while I'm as blue as indigo, which doesn't go well with red hair. Would you mind very much if we didn't go to the Claremont after all?"

"Not a bit. I'm sorry Mrs. Carruthers isn't feeling well. I trust—"

"Oh, it's nothing. Just a bit fagged. I'll tell you what: Let's you and I go up to Peggy O'Brian's for tea. Peggy always cheers me up. Her chatter is vocal champagne. I'll see if she's in." She started toward the telephone, then stopped. "But, no; I'd better not call up. She might be out, and then we couldn't go."

He helped her into a beautiful limousine that she had never seen before.

"My own car's laid up," he explained in answer to her unspoken question. "Some particularly acute form of mechanical indigestion this time—It had to go to the factory, so they lent me this palatial night lunch wagon to take its place. And it's *such* a corking day to be all cooped up," he regretted.

It was a wonderful day—one of those soft, balmy spring days that in the joy of its own



sunshine has danced on ahead of the procession and reached us a month before its allotted season. But as they glided silently up the Avenue, their chauffeur weaving his way dexterously in and out between the slower vehicles, Jane felt little of the joy and brightness of the day. With the relaxation of her body on the deeply upholstered cushions, her mind, too, relaxed, and everything was dull and gray. What had her father meant? "Shame—disgrace"—What could her mother—But that was absurd. And yet—that quick, flashing smile of LeVey's when he had played that night—it haunted her. What if—Oh, it was maddening!

The car had come to a halt. It was Forty-second Street and they were being held up for the cross-town traffic to pass. She looked up to find Bannister's clear, kindly eyes regarding her quizzically. He laid his hand upon hers and gave it a reassuring little pressure.

"There is something wrong, isn't there?" Then, longingly: "I wish I had the right—Jane, couldn't—?"

Something in his voice gave her a delightful flutter of alarm.

"Why J!" she exclaimed with a flustered

show of gayety. "You sound just as though you were going to propose."

"I am."

"Oh, but J, you mustn't," she pleaded, gently withdrawing her hand. "*Please*, J—you mustn't."

After a moment's silence: "Is—is there anyone else, Jane?"—an old question, to be sure, but then the mating of men and maids is a very ancient custom. "Is there someone else?" This time it was Bannister's mind that pictured the flash of LeVey's quick smile.

"No, there is no one else," Jane told him. And then, thinking of her mother: "That is—Oh, how can I tell? I wish—I don't really know." Her voice became wistful: "Can't we be just friends, J?"

"Perhaps *you* can," he told her with a queer little smile. "*I* can't."

The traffic policeman's whistle blew shrilly as though to change the subject, and the car started forward.

Jane looked with languid interest out at the crowded sidewalks and the alluring shop windows. She dimly realized what a wonderful, sparkling day it was; she even permitted a little ray of sunshine to brighten up the gray of

her soul. Her feelings, as nearly as she could analyze them were this: She hadn't wanted him to propose, but she had wanted him to want to propose. And—she stole a glance at him out of the tail of her eyes—yes, he really had wanted, very much.

They found that Peggy was out. Jane gave a little sigh of relief. "I think I'm glad, aren't you?"

Bannister regarded her with amusement. "Then why on earth did you want to go?" he wondered.

Jane shrugged. "How do *I* know? If we really ever understood ourselves think how we'd hate ourselves. It's bad enough to have to be constantly with someone every second of the day whom we don't quite understand. 'Know thyself?'— It would be intolerable."

"I think I'd almost be willing to risk it—in your case."

Jane reproached him with her eyes.

The car fell in with the great tide of vehicles flowing down the Avenue; smart looking carriages taking their owners home; smooth running motors taking *their* owners to their apartments. As they passed Madison

Square and entered that part of Fifth Avenue that has been referred to by one brilliant journalist as the greatest mill street in the world, they found their progress halted by hordes of workers pouring out of the huge buildings, swarming over eastward to their tenements. Boys on the sidewalks were calling their newspapers in some strident, whining tongue. At every crossing, on these human ants swarmed. Brown eyed, dark and squat were most of them. The ankles of some were bent out; the ankles of some were bent in; several of them limped a trifle, as though bearing the echo of some injury received by an ancestor in the fall of Babylon. "The future of America," thought Bannister. Here and there was a straight, slight figure among them, a pair of appealing sloe eyes, or a mouth made for love rather than bitterness.

"You know," he told Jane, "a few of them would be downright beautiful—if they didn't look so much like others who aren't."

Then, suddenly, as though some imaginary line had been drawn between the future and the past, they emerged from all the hurly-burly into the quiet respectability of the Avenue just

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above Washington Square. At the house they found LeVey taking his leave of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers.

"I'm very sorry you missed us," Jane told him, apparently without any significance in the order in which she put the words.

Something about LeVey puzzled Bannister. After the formal greeting he stood in the background vaguely trying to place him; trying to remember where he had seen, not LeVey himself but someone like him,—or was it a great many people who were like him? It flashed across his mind: hundreds and hundreds of them—all with the same quick dark brown eyes, mingling the fire of hope with patience born of centuries of suffering—thousands of them, pouring out of the buildings, swarming into the avenue. They were the raw material; LeVey was the refined essence, the over-polished product.

"—and won't you set a day; Thursday, say, at five?" Bannister found himself saying. He had been asking them, LeVey included, to tea at his rooms. They all said it would be delightful, all except Mr. Carruthers, who, as upon most matters, preserved a comatose neutrality.

A shade of hopeless yearning crossed Bannister's eyes as he took Jane's hand to say good-night. He turned to LeVey.

"Won't you let me run you up town?" he asked. Perhaps he was sportsman enough to be able to play the game when he was losing; or perhaps he was human enough to want LeVey to see himself in those swarming others, just as he had seen him. Bannister was too heart-weary to ask himself which.

## CHAPTER VI

EARLY in the afternoon that he was to have the Carruthers to tea, Bannister, with a final word of instruction to his man, Michael, strolled up to a Gramercy Park club famed for the comfort of its big, motherly leather chairs. It was that twilight in club attendance, midway between the latest luncheon and the earliest cocktail. The lounging room was deserted save for a long, weedy young man over in the corner who was loafing behind a weekly paper and a tall glass of whiskey and water. The most expensive tailor in the world had been unable to conceal the fact that he was bottle-shouldered. A closely trimmed prophylactic mustache failed to hide the weakness of his mouth, and his constant scowl was unsuccessful in distracting attention from a receding chin. His family tree had suffered from lack of pruning.

"Aw, hello, Bannister,"—looking up—  
"Have a drink?"

"How are you—er—old man?"—Bannister never could remember names. He dragged up a chair.

"Seen this week's *Chat?*" drawled "old man," passing his paper over. "Corker on poor old Denny O'Brian."

Bannister glanced at the paragraph indicated.

"Col. 'Denny' O'Brian," it ran, "is out west with Tommy Vanderhof, supposedly visiting one of the latter's mines. In the meanwhile Mrs. Denny remains in New York consoling herself as best she can for the gallant colonel's absence. Mrs. Denny is a young woman of great resources."

In the paragraph immediately beneath this the reader was informed that "an amusing experience, of which a certain dashing young Irishman was the hero, recently took place in a well known Fifth Avenue hatter's." There followed the anecdote of Denny's encounter with Mrs. Haskins that Peggy O'Brian had related at the Carruthers' dinner table. "Is it any wonder," the paragraph asked in conclusion, "that upon sober second thought the gentleman involved suddenly recollected that he had never 'seen America first,' and is now in



the far west with another well known New York clubman?"

"Cad," muttered Bannister, throwing down the paper. Then aloud: "What sort is this LeVey? Know anything about him?"

"Oh," yawned the other, "he's a bit of an impressionist as far as ethics go, I dare say. Entertaining chap, though. Very." He reached for the paper and lazily resumed his search for fresh bits of gossip.

Bannister got up, stretched, and said that he had to be getting along. What a contemptible cad LeVey was, he told himself on his way out. And then he remembered that at Jane's suggestion he had also invited Peggy O'Brian to his tea. If she had seen *Chat*—perhaps he'd better telephone her; their meeting might be embarrassing. He called for the phone directory and began to look for her number. Then he changed his mind. She might consider any mention of the thing an impertinence. And to tell the truth, he dreaded telephoning. Once when he thought he had agreed by phone to buy a Rice electric which he wanted very much, it turned out that he had bought innumerable bottles of Rye Selected, which he

didn't want at all. Besides, it was almost time for him to be getting dressed.

Bannister's rooms were much the same as those of any other prosperous bachelor whose taste is not entirely a matter of tongue and palate. They contained good engravings in plain frames, handsome rugs, a minimum of window curtains, and a total absence of dainty lingerie on tables, mantles and piano. The chairs were of no particular period; they looked as though they had been made by some man named John Brown who thoroughly understood the business of making strong, comfortable chairs.

Jane and her mother arrived with LeVey. Mr. Carruthers was not feeling well.

"Isn't this—restful," said Jane when Michael had taken their things. Being a woman, she had already, with her mind's eye, picked out spots that needed chintz and dabs of color.

"Most attractive," echoed LeVey.

"And so immaculate. You know that's the first thing a woman always looks for in a man's rooms," laughed Mrs. Carruthers. "But there isn't a speck of dust anywhere."

"That was Michael's idea," Bannister grinningly explained, with a nod toward the pantry door. "We had a woman in. Michael said that since there were ladies coming, we'd better. He says that while a man invariably keeps rooms very much cleaner than a woman does, he always overlooks the particular places that a woman always looks at first. Therefore, as there were ladies coming this afternoon, Michael thought that if we got a woman in to clean"—A muffled crash interrupted him. "Heigho!" he exclaimed with a shrug of mock despair, "I've gone and broken a cup. I didn't know Michael could hear me."

A moment later Michael, himself, mouth tightly compressed and eyes as solemn as Irish blue eyes with twinkle-tracks running to the corners can be, entered with the tea things.

"Will you pour, Mrs. Carruthers?" Bannister asked.

Michael, with one eye-brow inquiringly cocked, was staring at LeVey, who, half turned from him, was talking to Jane. Feeling Bannister's eyes upon him Michael came to himself with a start. "Yes, sir. And may I serve the punch now, sir?"

Bannister nodded, and started to assist Mrs. Carruthers with the tea.

A salute of three guns, at about the interval required to empty a bottle of champagne into a punch bowl,—Michael couldn't have timed it better if he'd tried—followed by a buzz of the door bell, heralded the entrance of Mrs. Peggy O'Brian, radiant and smiling. As she caught sight of LeVey she assumed an expression of great anxiety and glanced hastily about the room. "Ah," she said with apparent relief as she saw Mrs. Carruthers and went forward to greet her, "thank goodness you're here. With these conscientious paragraphers around," lightly indicating LeVey with a nod, "who let no—er—social convention whatever interfere with their service of their public, one can never be too careful to have adequate chaperonage. Will you chaperon me, Mrs. Carruthers, if I chaperon you?" LeVey flushed quickly and started to speak, but just then Peggy caught sight of Michael entering with a huge bowl of punch. "Oo-o, how perfectly delicious!" she rapturously exclaimed. "It looks good enough to—to drink! Then you must be Michael?"

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"It is, ma'am. I mean—that is, I am, ma'am," mumbled Michael, both pleased and embarrassed.

LeVey was not to be denied. "You really must let me explain about those paragraphs in *Chat*," he was telling her apologetically. "It was all a most horrible mistake. I feared that you never would speak to me again."

"Don't you mean rather you were afraid that I would speak to you the very first time I saw you?" Though she spoke lightly there was an undercurrent in her tone that cut.

"I fear you can never forgive me. You remember," he asked, including the others, "that amusing little episode of Mrs. Haskins in the hatter's that Mrs. O'Brian told us at dinner that night? Well, the next day at the office, my associate editor remarked that he hadn't seen Col. O'Brian lately; he wondered where he was. I, purely in conversation, never dreaming that he would print it— But have you seen this week's *Chat*?" He was the picture of abject contrition. "Can you imagine my mortification?"

"With pleasure," murmured Peggy a trifle ambiguously as she accepted the cup of punch Bannister offered. "Your man, Michael is a

dear," she told the latter, skillfully maneuvering him over toward Jane. "I love to see him keep from laughing at us. It makes the back of his neck blush so beautifully. Have you told Jane how you found him?"

Peggy figured that in order to tell of Michael, who was continually coming in from the next room, Bannister would have to key his voice to that confidential pitch that might, when they were through with Michael, lead to— If men only weren't such stupid creatures! She went over to LeVey and Mrs. Caruthers and interested them in things in which she, herself, felt not the slightest interest.

"I was telling Mrs. O'Brian about Michael the other evening when I took her home from your house," Bannister explained to Jane. "We saw a billboard advertisement that reminded me of the time I found him."

"A billboard advertisement?"

"Yes. It was almost four years ago, one bitter winter afternoon. He stopped me on the street and told me he'd had nothing to eat for two days. There had been a waiters' strike he said, and when it was over they'd refused to take him back. I brushed him aside—they're fakers, most of 'em—and

walked on. But there was something in his brogue, or his eyes—have you noticed his eyes?—that haunted me for the next two blocks. I turned and went back. I found him standing all tattered and pinched and shivering, looking up at a four-sheet poster on a fence—and smiling. Think of it—starving and half frozen, he was actually *smiling*! I looked for the cause of it. ‘Hodgkins’ Relish,’ the poster read, ‘The Sauce that Gives You an Appetite’!”

“Oh,” murmured Jane. “And you—?”

“I needed a man with that much sense of humor,” replied Bannister.

As Michael came in with a fresh tray of refreshments Jane looked at him with renewed interest. “He *is* nice—Peggy was right. And isn’t Peggy, herself, a dear! I know she must feel dreadfully about that thing in *Chat*—even although it wasn’t Mr. LeVey’s fault, of course. She simply worships Denny, you know. Most people don’t understand her little flirtations. She merely uses them to stretch her heart to make more room for her great big love for Denny.” Then, searching his eyes with the slightest suspicion of a question in her own: “She likes *you*, J.”

Other guests began to arrive, singly and in pairs. There came a black velvet Empire gown, relieved by big scarlet poinsettias at the waist, and surmounted by a round velvet hat set on pale gold hair; a soft brown clingy creation with silver-green leaves, surmounted by a silver-green turban set on nut-brown hair, the whole being blended together by some subtle, alluring perfume that might have been the essence of osculation; three gowns not noticed because of the two just mentioned; two conventional men's cutaways, one with braid and one without, and one frock coat either entirely out of fashion or just coming in again. All of this raiment was adequately filled, and it was not long before Bannister's little party had degenerated into a regular tea.

At last it was over. When Bannister had seen the Carruthers to the elevator, he threw off his outer clothes, slipped into a gaudy silk dressing gown, and flung himself, utterly exhausted, into the most sympathetic of the big, squashy easy-chairs.

Michael came in, and paused awkwardly, as though about to speak. But as Bannister was unresponsive, he merely scratched his head thoughtfully, and carried out the punch bowl.



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In a few moments he returned and again acted as though he had something on his mind. He coughed apologetically.

"Well, Michael?" wondered Bannister, looking up with a tired smile.

"If you please, sir," began Michael, scratching his head again, in evident embarrassment. "This man—er—this Mr. Levy who was here—"

"You mean LeVey?" suggested Bannister. Then, as the significance of Michael's pronounciation suddenly dawned on him he sat up, all attention.

"If you'll pardon me askin', sir, an' is it a particular friend of yours he is?"

"Far from it, Michael. Why, what do you know about him?"

"If you please, sir, I wasn't sure at first, not expectin' it, but I thought there was something familiar, an' when I had a good look at him—I thought you ought to know, an'—"

"Yes, yes?"— Bannister remembered Michael's scrutiny of LeVey when the latter had first arrived.

"You remember, sir, before I came to you I'd been a waiter? It was way back when I was a boy, this—LeVey is it he calls him-

self?—Morris Levy, he was then. He was a waiter in—”

“What! LeVey? Are you sure?”

“As sure as I am of the nose on me own face. At first, what with his mustache an’ goatee an’ all the fine clothes of him he had me puzzled. But the moment I saw that oily smile—Why, sir, I’d know him at the bottom of a well. ’Twas up at Parson’s with him I first learned the business. I used to be his ’bus. You remember Parson’s when it first started—the elegant supper thrade they had after the theayter? Actresses an’ such like, with dresses an’ diamonds that made millionaires scatter money like bank clerks? An’ then, when I hadn’t been there more’n a couple of months this Levy got fired. I didn’t know the reason of it at the time, but I afterwards learned he was a ‘barney’.”

“A barney?” queried Bannister, puzzled.

“Yes, sir. It’s the nick-name for ‘barnacle’ like the barnacles that foul up a ship’s bottom. It’s the name the police have for them dirty vampires that fasten onto some rich guy who’s in wrong, an’ bleed him to death, threatenin’ to tell his wife an’ family if he don’t come up with the price.”

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“Blackmail!”

“That’s it. An’ ye can see how easy it is for waiters. People look upon us as so much furniture, just like so many knives an’ forks, an’ they say things before us they would dare whisper in front of a deaf mute who was goin’ to die before he saw anyone else. But every once an’ a while they press some old geezer too hard, or stack up against the wrong kind of guy, an’ there’s a roundabout complaint to the manager that a certain waiter spilled soup down someone’s back, or else he was impertinent or something, and—zing!” Michael vividly illustrated the offender’s instant dismissal with a flip of the finger.

“And then what?” Bannister asked eagerly. “What did LeVey do after he lost his job?”

“Oh, he drifted around from one restaurant to another for a while. He never stayed any place more’n a couple of months or so—they never do. But he seemed to be gettin’ more’n more prosperous all the time. An’ then I lost track of him. The last I heard of him was from a ‘bull’ I knew—one of them Central Office gumshoe men. He said he’d seen Levy drivin’ a night-hawk cab. That was eight or nine years ago, y’see, sir, back

in the days when all the young bloods plowed their wild-oat fields in hansoms. You can see what an elegant chance it would be for a barney, with every blessed word comin' up to him through the little door in the roof of his cab,—that, an' knowin' where he left his passengers—the dirty hound!

“Why, Mister Bannister, there's barneys in this town with lists of names as long as your arm, an' with each name good for its little hundred or thousand every time the scoundrels make their threat. Sometimes, of course, they put the screws on a little too tight, an' then there's a suicide, or a scandal or something, an' they have to find another poor sucker to take his place.”

“But if the police know all this,” objected Bannister, “if they know who these scoundrels are, why don't they jail 'em? Why don't they—”

“But, sir, who's to prove it on 'em? It isn't natural that a man who's payin' to keep from havin' mud slung at him would come out of his own free will an' smear mud all over himself just to get even with the other fellow. Sure an' it isn't human nature.

“Why, sir, do you know how the proprietor

of one of the biggest hotels in town got to where he is to-day? Bartender in one of them swell road-houses where the haughty chorus girl and the humble millionaire meet on an equal footing. An' when he wants to raise the capital for his hotel, what does he do? Goes to one of the big trust magets that used to visit his place an' invites him to back him. Offers to give him first chance at the investment just for the sake of the old road-house days. He recalls a few of them happy times to the millionaire, who, bein' a family man with a wife in Pittsburg an' two sons in Yale, is so overcome with sentiment—Bah!”

Michael's disgust was too great for words. He worked it off by feverishly cluttering the tea things on to his tray. As he was about to carry it out some new thought caused him to pause.

“An' might I ask, sir, what is he doin' now?—this *Mister Levy*?”

Bannister had been busy with his own thoughts. “What? Oh—Why, LeVey's the owner of *Chat*. It's a weekly paper—”

“*Chat*? That dirty sheet?” Michael set down his tray and raised his hand to his chin

as though he had suddenly remembered something. "Do you recollect, sir, the black eye I had a couple of weeks ago? You said nothin' about it at the time, but—"

"Yes, Michael, I remember it. That I said nothing about it was not due to lack of interest. I was constantly on the lookout, whenever I left the house, for someone with at least two black eyes. I'd a natural curiosity to see what had happened to your friend."

Michael failed to smile. "There was a couple of 'em," he said grimly. "I'd just dropped in at the corner—you'd told me you'd not be wantin' me that evenin', an'—I don't know how they knew that I was your man, sir, but they tried to pump me. They said they were newspaper reporters after social news. They even offered me money. An' then one of 'em—the tall, thin one—began to insinuate—Well, sir, they tried to draw me out."

"And they succeeded in drawing out only your fists—violently?" suggested Bannister with an amused smile.

Michael's face was twisted up in a tangle of thought that even scratching the head failed to unravel.

"Might I ask, sir, beggin' your pardon," he finally ventured, "an' has this Levy any cause for grievance against you?"

Bannister merely shrugged and, leaning forward, rested his chin in the cradle of his palms. Michael tactfully picked up his tray and left him to his thoughts.

LeVey a blackmailer, thought Bannister. He had known it,—that is, he'd been practically sure. But this! And Jane! Did she really care for this slimy reptile? Good God! Supposing—but what could *he* do about it?—he, a rejected suitor? He pressed his forehead hard against his clenched fists.

"Jane!" he murmured. "Jane!"

Michael, about to re-enter, turned and tiptoed softly back into the pantry.

"Jane?" he wondered. "Jane?"

All at once a smile of perfect satisfaction dispelled his look of perplexity, and he set to washing dishes with joy and enthusiasm.

## CHAPTER VII

JONES BANNISTER, walking up Lexington Avenue from Gramercy Park one night, was idly reflecting upon an article that he had chanced upon in one of the evening papers. The Japanese, it seemed, sow their wild oats in old age instead of in youth. They feel that a man should bring to his country and his family the best that is in him, untainted and unjaded. Then, when he is no longer in the full freshness of his vigor, when his son is ready to take his place as head of the family, custom permits him to do with the rest of his life as he will. How much better than our hypocritical Anglo-Saxon way, reflected Bannister with self-congratulation. If a man must at some time of his life revert to the unbridled animal state— But why sow wild oats at all? He, himself, had never been considered a prig, even in the rather irresponsible set in which he traveled, but, thank God, he could go to the woman he loved—

Often when we are most satisfied with our-



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selves Fate seems to take a malicious delight in jogging our memories.

As he was passing one of those brilliantly lighted Lexington Avenue hotels of very certain reputation, a woman, coming toward him out of the shadow, ventured a timid "Hello."

He stopped short, his reverie broken. Only a street walker. He was about to go on. Then, something familiar—the eyes, the sunset of a smile that he had known in its full noon— "Molly Farnum!"

She drew back, so familiar with harm that harmlessness alarmed her. Then, as the light of recognition faintly kindled in her tired eyes, she slowly took the outstretched hand.

"Banny-boy," she murmured, dazed, as if confronted by some ghost of her own dead past.

"And to think that after all these years, Molly, you should recognize me! It's good to make a fellow *know* he hasn't changed so very much."

She glanced at him shyly. His greeting—it was like Banny. Of course he knew she hadn't recognized him; that she'd taken him for merely *a* man.

"And you, Molly?" He stepped back and

surveyed her. A trifle shabby, in spite of the air with which she still wore her clothes; she was thin, now, rather than slender; the fire behind the ashen gray eyes had smoldered out; the mouth that used to laugh at nothing now drooped at something; the hollow cheeks, pale behind their color— Why, the girl was hungry!

“The same old Molly lady,” he smiled with an approving nod of his head. “And where are you going? Can’t we talk over old times somewhere? I’m famished. Have you dined yet? Come and sit with me whether you have or not.”

Bannister had finished dinner less than an hour before, but in the café he ordered steak and vegetables and wine—not champagne, but rich, red burgundy to warm the blood and cheer the heart.

Every woman is a gentlewoman when she is with a gentleman. It takes a coarse man to bring out coarseness in any woman; an immoral man to bring out her immorality. Gradually, as Bannister talked, Molly Farnum responded to his mood, and became once more the care-free butterfly whose flashing beauty and delicate wit had alternately been

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the despair and the delight of Broadway.

Where was Tommy Vanderhof now? she wondered. Out West? Tommy was a dear. And Eddie Demorest? and great big Bummy Lang, the old Yale guard? And Banny, himself— “What have *you* been doing, Banny? Do you remember the time your uncle asked you what you intended to do for a living, and you politely told him you thought you’d better keep on nephewing for a while? You ride a good deal, and travel around a bit. I see your name in the papers.”

When they were sipping their coffee, her humor suddenly changed. The flame died down and she became silent. As she looked into his eyes a wistful expression came into her own.

“Do you know, Banny-boy,” she said, laying her hand upon his and giving it an impulsive little pressure, “I’m glad I never knew you any better than I did—or I couldn’t have known you half so well.”

Outside, Bannister asked her if he couldn’t call her a taxi and take her wherever she was going. No, she would walk; it was only a few blocks farther down, she told him, with a tired smile.

As he took out his wallet she instinctively drew back a little, vaguely hurt. He scribbled his address on a card.

"And whenever you have nothing better to do— You don't know how good it's been to dine with an old friend and talk over old times — If you'll just drop me a line— Will you?"

With a firm hand clasp they parted. He swung on up town, thinking. She went on down, trying *not* to think.

"Hello."

Glancing up, she saw a smooth-faced, bleached-out-looking creature with little pig-like eyes. She recognized him as a man who had entered the café shortly after she and Bannister. He had seated himself at the next table.

"Hello," he repeated with an insinuating leer.

She came out of herself with an inward shock and instantly assumed the dead smile of her profession. "Hello," she assented with weary resignation.

Mr. LeVey's man, Skeer, had at last found Molly Farnum.

## CHAPTER VIII

**L** EVEY was sitting in his private office at *Chat*. The heavy velour curtains at the double window were drawn, and the soft light from the yellow-shaded lamp gave the place the atmosphere of evening. As a matter of fact it was but a little after noon and LeVey had just finished looking over his morning mail. There was a sharp rap at the brass knocker on the other side of the heavy oak door. The Angora cat, dozing on top of the bookshelves, awoke with a start and arched its back into a graceful stretch. LeVey slid certain letters into the drawer of the carved oak table at which he sat, and pulled a silken cord which unfastened the latch.

"Well," he inquired in a bored tone.

An overgrown, stupid-looking office boy slunk in, and, following his training, closed the door softly behind him.

"There's a man outside wants to see you, Mr. LeVey," he said, nervously pulling at his hands and shifting his weight from one weedy leg to the other. "He didn't give no name,

but he told Miss Montesque that you'd know him all right, all right. He's a little thin man wit' a gray mustache an' a yellor face. Miss Montesque says he's been here before a couple of times wit' you. Oh, yeh, an' he's lit."

"You mean that he has been drinking?"

"Yeh."

LeVey frowned. "Tell him I have nothing for him just now; I will communicate with him as soon as I have. He will understand."

The boy went out, but before LeVey had time to settle down to his work, was back again. "I told him you didn't have nothin' for him, an' he says to tell you he has some-thin' for you. Miss Montesque asked him if he couldn't leave it, an' he says that that's all right; you'll get it before you want it."

LeVey made a little gesture of annoyance and twisted the points of his mustache. "Oh, well," he finally decided, "I suppose I may as well see what he wants and get it over with. Show him in."

"He didn't wait."

"What! Then what the devil are you bothering me for! What—" He stopped short, for the boy in his hasty retreat had opened the door, and LeVey made it a point to lose his

temper only in the strict privacy of his sanctum where he could afterwards recover it without the interference of outside aid.

When he was once more alone he settled down deep in his chair and, chin on chest, began to think. Uneasy thoughts they were, judging by the little furrows that lined his forehead. His unrest seemed to communicate itself. With a soft plunk the fluffy Angora landed on his shoulders and then sinuously picked its way down to his lap. It expected petting, and clawed impatiently at his coat-sleeve to call attention to the fact. LeVey, amused, gently stroked the soft fur. Suddenly a new line of thought caused him to drop the cat unceremoniously to the floor. He got up and began to pace the room.

Jane Carruthers, he reflected, would be at the week-end dance that the Oakleighs were giving in their Westchester house. She had told him when he had suggested a dinner party for her the same evening. Jones Bannister would not be there; he was playing polo that week on Long Island. And Peggy O'Brian was visiting her sister in Washington. With his love of the proper stage setting he conjured up a picture of the Oakleighs' huge conserva-

tory hung with mellow lanterns; the long stretches of rolling country bathed in silver moonlight—yes, with a glance at the calendar—there would be a moon; the soft pulsing strains of a stringed orchestra floating in from the ballroom. Everything. True, he, himself, had not been invited, but— He pressed his foot on the slight hump in the thick rug, and the buzzer echoed faintly.

A moment later the secret panel in the wall slid silently open and the washed-out Mr. Skeer entered.

“Good morning, Mr. Skeer. I wanted to ask you about the Oakleighs of Westchester. We have printed nothing about them for some time.”

“Nothing since their last reconciliation over a year ago.” Skeer never looked directly at the person to whom he was speaking. His shifty little white-lashed eyes were forever glancing restlessly about, as though to see how the exits lay in case of fire—or something.

“Um-m,” mused LeVey. “And since then? Has Mr. Oakleigh been—er—well, exactly faithful to his wife?”

“Oh, yes—several times,” said Skeer with a sneering smile.



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LeVey ignored the jest. He loathed vulgarity—in others. “I see,” he said gravely. “Well, bring me what data you have upon the subject. And, oh, yes: what have you managed to find out about Jones Bannister?”

“Well, we’ve had our best men up against that man Michael of his, but they can’t seem to touch him with either drink or money. He almost killed Salvatori and Luce the other night when they intimated that his master—You see they think they’re getting evidence for a divorce case. I’ve got ’em looking up Michael’s past performances now. They may be able to run across something they can hold over him. I ought to have a report on that to-morrow morning.”

“And this—er—Farnum woman?” suggested LeVey, consulting a slip of paper on the table. “You were to see her again last night, I believe.”

“She showed up all right,” said Skeer, shifting uneasily, “but it was the same old game. The minute I mentioned Bannister she closes up like a clam. Unless I miss my guess, she’s plumb dippy about him still.”

“Hm-m.” LeVey frowned and began to

tap the table with his long white fingers. Obviously Skeer, with all his shrewdness, did not know how to handle women. If LeVey could only risk seeing her himself! If— Ah!

“Then she is really fond of Bannister. Good,” he announced, looking up. “I will see her myself. Not here, of course,”—noticing Skeer’s astonishment. “Some place in which there is not the slightest chance of my being known. Where does she live? Well, I will call upon her there. Make an appointment for me for some time Tuesday.” Skeer began jotting down shorthand characters in his note book. LeVey continued: “I am to be Mr. Maurice, a lawyer. Have visiting cards to that effect made at once. I am acting for Mr. Bannister’s best interests. Miss Farnum can be of great service to him in a matter of grave importance, a matter in which he would hesitate to himself ask the aid of a lady. Incidentally the service will be highly remunerative to her. Let me know Tuesday morning. Is everything clear?”

Skeer nodded.

“Good. And now bring me that Oakleigh data. I wish to telephone.”

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The Oakleighs' week-end dance was all that any hostess could desire—if what she desired were a successful week-end dance, for there were little lines, frayed ends of heart-weariness, in Mrs. Oakleigh's well-bred face that sometimes made one wonder. Everyone seemed in happy mood; the women's filmy gowns made an alluring picture against the soft greens of the decorations; out beyond, through the conservatory, the moon was smiling approval upon the soft spring night, and—final touch to the illusion of fairyland—James had *not* put too much sugar in the punch.

The stringed orchestra, having previously treated itself to an old-fashioned waltz tune, was now compensating its employers with the accompaniment to one of those modern dances which at first glance seem to indicate that St. Vitus is "much better now, thank you."

"Look at that," growled an old bachelor, surveying the scene with Mr. Oakleigh from a point of vantage near the punch bowl. "And they call that dancing!" With a snort of disgust he refilled his glass. He prided himself upon being a confirmed woman hater, and, like most of his profession, bestowed careful

attention upon every detail of his dress and grooming, as though to make his disapproval a real misfortune to the whole unlucky sex. That he never declined an invitation to any function attended by ladies might indicate that he found a cruel satisfaction in ever reminding them of their loss. "The women are to blame for it," he resumed with a nod toward the dancers. "They like anything that gives them a chance to show how gracefully they can be awkward. Man looks clumsier, but he really isn't. A woman can knock a cup off a tray so that it smashes into a thousand pieces and all you think is how very graceful she really is about it; man comes along and keeps from smashing anything, but he's so confounded awkward about it that you immediately set him down for a butter-fingered clown. Why, think of how awkward a man seems when he steps on a lady's dress. And when a woman steps on a man's foot, what then? Why, she gracefully manages to make him look awkward for having his clumsy feet in the way."

"Oh, I don't know," said Oakleigh with mild amusement. "Look at LeVey there, dancing with that stunning Carruthers girl.

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He just stepped on a woman's gown and apologized so gracefully without losing a step, that it might almost have been part of the dance."

"That snake!" sneered the misogynist contemptuously. "He only goes to prove my point. That man's got woman blood in him."

"Gets it from his mother, no doubt," ventured Oakleigh with a yawn. "Hello, they're stopping. I must see if I can't have this next one with Miss Carruthers. She's just as easy to dance with as she is to look at," and he started across the floor.

But before he could reach her LeVey had already piloted Jane to a palm-sheltered corner of the conservatory.

Everything was working out exactly as he had planned it. The physical reaction from the staccato vivacity of the rag-time number, he figured, would make welcome to Jane his suggestion that they stroll out into the conservatory. The moonlit hills, the jagged splotches of silver through the filigree of foliage, the whole night, he told her—it was music, painting and poetry combined; too glorious, too wonderful ever to be transcribed. LeVey had furthermore reasoned that the dance just over would be followed by some

dreamy waltz, a suitable accompaniment to what he intended to say to her. But they had reached the corner he had selected amid the palms before the orchestra was ready to play again.

"You have no wrap," he noticed with polite concern.

"But, really, it is so warm," murmured Jane, drinking in the wine of the night with a deep breath.

"But it is not safe when you have just been dancing. Your scarf. It is by the door. Wait," and before she could protest he had gone for it. The stage was set and the hero waiting, but he must not risk spoiling the effect by raising the curtain before his orchestra was ready.

As the opening strains of a languorous Waldteufel waltz, pulsing with warm, wine-colored melody, floated in from the ballroom, LeVey returned. Jane was standing gazing out over the magic landscape. He lingeringly placed the cobweb scarf about her shoulders and stood, silent and motionless under the spell of it. The music was wistful, plaintive; now the violins were sobbing. LeVey drew a deep sigh. Jane half turned.

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"Jane," he whispered gently.

There was no mistaking the tone.

She bowed her head as though to hide the faint color that caressed her cheek; but she made no sign of protest. She knew that Love was speaking. Love: the light of its eyes was the light of the pale yellow moon; the fragrance of its breath was the fragrance of the balmy night air; the throbbing of its heart was the throbbing of the warm, pulsing melody of the violins. That it was speaking through the voice of LeVey she did not realize, so insidiously had he woven his self into the atmosphere of the surroundings.

"Jane," he repeated gently. "I had never hoped—I have never dared— Oh, but how can I say it with words! Words are for thoughts; how can I express the heart, the soul, the very life of me? I know I am not worthy—no man can be. But I love you so! Ah, how I love you—love you—love *you!*"

She retreated a step before his passionate outburst. "Don't," she pleaded, a little thrilled, a little frightened. "You mustn't."

With apparent effort he regained control of himself. "I have spoken to your father," he continued calmly. "I have reason to know

that our marriage would make him very happy." A note of oiliness crept into his manner. "Your father and I—"

Jane whirled on him with sudden suspicion. "My father!" The whole wretched scene with her father, his anxiety, his insinuations, flashed upon her brain. "It would make *him* very happy!" she repeated scornfully. "It is true, then. You hold something over him, and through him you would force—" She stopped; her mother—it was her mother who would suffer.

LeVey was very white and earnest. "You wrong me," he told her with quiet dignity. "Stop to think: is it such a very great crime to ask a gentleman's permission to sue for his daughter's hand? It is true that your father and I have been closely associated in—er—a certain matter. It is true that I may be of help to him in this affair. I trust to heaven that I may. But do you think that my love is such that I would make service to you or yours conditional rather than a privilege? Jane, Jane!" There was an earnestness in his words that deceived even himself. He was the great actor, for the moment believing himself the noble character he portrayed. "I love



you," he said simply. A slight quaver came into his voice. "I wanted *your* love. But—" He broke off, and with a helpless little gesture of despair, turned from her.

In an instant Jane was all womanly sympathy, thinking only of the man she had injured. "I did not think—I did not mean—"

A sharp rustling in the foliage behind them caused them quickly to step apart. The intruder, a round-faced youth with a pneumatic figure, seemed even more embarrassed than they.

"Oh, I beg—er—I was looking for Miss Ainsley," he stammered. "You haven't seen Dick Oakleigh anywhere, have you?"

Having thus unconsciously put his clumsy foot through the filmy gauze of romance, he bustled off back to the ballroom.

## CHAPTER IX

“IF women do have an inclination to gossip they get it from their fathers,” mused Bannister in the Gotham Club Sunday evening. He held a newspaper in reading position, but the noisy conversation of a group of younger members near by filled his ears.

“It was some party all right,” concluded a round-faced youth, who had the crisp intonation, the characteristic mannerisms and everything except the actual words of a real wit. “And, oh, yes. Society note: that LeVey person, the *Chat* man, you know, is engaged to that stunning red-haired Carruthers girl.”

Bannister’s fingers crumpled the edges of the paper in a spasmodic clutch. He started to throw it aside and get up, but instead turned a page ostentatiously and prepared to listen.

“She’s the one Montey Carey used to drink so much on account of,” commented a tired-looking blond man with a thinly spread physique. “And he never did meet her, did he?”

When was it announced? At the Oakleighs'?"

"It was at the Oakleighs'; but thanks to my discretion," said the wittish youth with a bow of mock acknowledgment, "it has *not* yet been announced. It was this way: They were playing one of those droopy waltzes and I butted into the conservatory."

"Your well known passion for growing things, I suppose," drawled the blond man.

"Well, at any rate, there they were, she with her head bent, and he gazing over her shoulder. Either one of two things, think I: there's a funny-looking bug or something on that palm, or else they've just gotten engaged. And afterwards when I looked at the palm there wasn't any bug."

This was more than Bannister could stand. Flinging the paper from him he got up and strode from the room. In the hall he stopped. Where was he going? What did he intend to do? If they really were engaged— He turned into the billiard room. The tables were shrouded for Sunday and the place was empty. He began to pace up and down. He remembered Jane's hesitation when he had asked if there was someone else. But Lord!

This was impossible! LeVey was a gutter-born scoundrel, a blackmailer, a—a— But what could he do? Go to her father? He half suspected that it was through him— What did LeVey hold over that wretched old man? Besides, what did Bannister, himself, really know? Only what Michael had told him. And if the police had been unable to prove anything, what could he hope to prove? He couldn't go to Jane, herself. He was a defeated rival. He was— Damn it all, he was a gentleman! Yes, there were times, he reflected bitterly, when it was a downright drawback to have been born a gentleman. He went to the telephones and had the boy call up LeVey's hotel. Mr. LeVey was out of town. No, he would leave no message; he would see him at his office in the morning. He called for his hat and stick, went out, and walked and walked—uptown—anywhere.

Promptly at nine o'clock Monday morning Bannister presented himself at the outer office of *Chat*. No, Mr. LeVey had not yet arrived, he was informed by the haughty brunette at the Wingate table.

"Do you know Mr. LeVey?" she inquired.

"Thoroughly," he snapped.

"Have you an appointment with him? No? Well, very often, you know, he does not come down at all. If you care to come back again about eleven—or better yet, you might phone —"

"I'll wait." His tone made it certain that he would wait. Picking out the most comfortable-looking chair in the place, he settled himself for a long siege. With a shrug that indicated the lady's inability to account for the vagaries of persons named Bannister, she gave her coiffure a deft pat or two, and resumed her task of polishing the nails of her right hand against the palm of her left.

For a time Bannister gazed at the auto-graphed photographs on the canary colored wall, idly speculating upon the moral lapses or petty ambitions that had brought them there. The postman came and dumped the mail—the blackmail, mused Bannister—upon the young woman's table. Languidly satisfying her curiosity as far as is possible from the outside of envelopes, she rang for the weedy office boy and turned them over to him for final distribution.

Bannister yawned. The design of any rug

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grows tiresome after the third time around. His glance wandered to the young woman at the table. She had finished her nails and was reading a novel now. The clock in the corner struck ten. It was a grandfather's clock. He wondered vaguely what this girl's grandfather had been like. For she must have had a grandfather. Everybody has grandfathers—even LeVey. He wondered—

The door opened and LeVey stepped briskly out of the elevator. "Good morning, Miss Montesque," he said. "Any—" and then he saw Bannister, who had risen to meet him. "Ah—er—how are you, Mr. Bannister?" A flash of reproachful inquiry directed at Miss Montesque was answered with a faint shrug of helplessness. He turned to Bannister again, his eyebrows raised in polite inquiry.

"I wished to see you, LeVey, about an important matter—important to both of us, I think."

"Yes?" His tone invited Bannister to proceed.

"It's a matter I should prefer to discuss in private. You, also, will prefer it so."

LeVey's brows knitted. He was puzzled.

What on earth could Bannister want? There was a directness and determination in his manner that was distinctly offensive.

"Um-mm." He pursed his lips thoughtfully. His hand sought the knob of the door to the inner office. "I'm very busy this morning," he said with well simulated regret. "If you could—"

"Good. I'm busy too. So the sooner we get at this thing the better." He had stepped up behind LeVey, ready to follow.

Oh, well, thought LeVey, they might as well have it over with. Moreover, his natural aversion to anything like an unpleasant scene was tempered by an uncomfortable curiosity. He turned the knob and led the way through the large room with the pecking typewriters. While he was fitting the key into the spring lock of his sanctum, the fluffy Angora cat appeared from some place, and began drawing its sides sinuously against his legs. The instant the door opened the cat darted through the crack. Purring loudly, and with plume-like tail erect and undulating, it stood in the middle of the rug awaiting them. When the door was closed behind them, shutting off all outside sound, it seemed to Bannister that

there was something feline in the soft, insinuating luxury of the place itself.

"Well?" purred LeVey from his chair by the yellow lamp.

Bannister felt the atmosphere of the place creeping into his veins and sapping his initiative like some insidious drug. This was no room for a clear-eyed, two-fisted man who slept with the windows wide open. In another minute he, too, would be softly purring and rubbing his hands. He pulled himself together and squared back his shoulders.

"You are engaged to Miss Carruthers," he started off.

LeVey seemed to receive the information with polite interest. . . . "I have seen no announcement of our engagement," was his non-committal comment.

"I am a friend of Miss Carruthers, and as a friend—"

"I remember; you met her in Bermuda."

"—and as a friend," he went on defiantly, "I should dislike to see—to see her marry—See here, LeVey; what's the use of mincing matters?"

"Yes, by all means let us drop this delicate indirectness. Speak frankly, I beg of you,"



LeVey urged with an airy wave of the hand.

Bannister ignored the sarcasm. "I care enough for Miss Carruthers to act as a father or an older brother." There was a quaver in his voice that his earnestness did not quite conceal. "True, she has a father—but—well, I imagine you know more about him than I do, don't you?" LeVey glanced sharply up at him. The gaze he met was steady and searching. "Of course if she loves a man, and that man loves her and is honorable and worthy," Bannister went on, "why then God bless her!—and him. That that man may be of humble origin—a waiter, say, or a cab-driver—"

LeVey straightened with a start. His hands clutched the arms of the chair. Wide-eyed, he stared at Bannister. His face was ghastly in the yellow light.

"He may have been a waiter, a cab-driver—anything," repeated Bannister slowly, regarding the other shrewdly with narrowed eyes, "—that makes no difference—so long as he has been honorable and is worthy." His tone suddenly became menacing: "But LeVey; but if that man—"

LeVey flung his arms out on the table and buried his head in them. His shoulders

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twitched convulsively as though in a sob. Bannister waited.

At last LeVey raised a white, haggard face, and pressed his hand to his forehead.

"No, I am not worthy," he said, half to himself. "Not in the way you mean, Bannister; but because no man can be worthy of—her. Waiter, cab driver,—yes, and before that a barefooted, hunger-pinched, little newsboy. I am ashamed of it. You, I think, would be proud of it. That is the difference: birth to those who have it means nothing—they have always had it; they always will have it; it is the one thing that Death alone can take away from them. To those who have not got it, it is the one thing they can never even hope to attain. You, who have birth, cannot understand. I who have done much that you would be proud to have done, am ashamed." Instantly his manner changed. The fire leaped into his eyes and he spoke directly to Bannister. "But that is all I am ashamed of! I know what you think. I know what they say of me. Lies—lies! I tell you, Bannister, my birth is all I have to be ashamed of!"

His vehement outburst did more than make Bannister waver in his judgment; for the mo-

ment it convinced LeVey himself. For the moment he was honest; he was wronged. And then the flame died out of his eyes as quickly as it had kindled. His tenseness relaxed. With a deep sigh he placed his elbow on the arm of the chair and rested his forehead in the crotch of his forefinger and thumb. His gaze seemed to penetrate the wine-colored walls and wander far off into his past.

"Waiter?—yes," he said reminiscently. "I was a waiter then. She was little more than a child. It must have been her first dinner in a restaurant. Her mother and father—it was their wedding anniversary, I think—there were a dozen altogether, perhaps—but I saw only her, with her sweet dignity, her marvelous beauty. I—I was only a waiter, a good waiter, and nobody ever notices a good waiter. But I saw *her*, and does it seem absurd to you that from that moment on, my whole life was changed? Before, I had been content to be a waiter. But now all was different. I must make myself one of those who are waited upon; I must make myself worthy to humble myself before a child-queen whose soul I had glimpsed through the glory of her eyes; I must keep my

life clean that I might make myself worthy. Every spare moment I had was spent in reading and study that I might better myself. I had learned who she was from one of the other waiters. Every day I searched for news of her, at this affair or that. At last, when she had her coming out, one of the papers printed her picture."

By a gold chain he wore about his neck he drew forth a leather locket, and opened it. Rising, he went over to Bannister and held it for him to see. Together they gazed with reverence at the faded and yellowed newspaper portrait. Reluctantly LeVey closed the locket and replaced it.

"That," he said, "has been my inspiration through all these long years of struggle. Worthy of her? God, no! I say again, no man that lives could be worthy of her. But honest? and clean? and honorable? Could any man, do you think, carry this always next his heart and be otherwise?"

"And yet you come to me—you who have known her but months, come to me and ask—" He broke off with a shrug of helplessness; the injustice of it was beyond words.

What would have been theatric in the living

air and bright light of the outside day was dramatic in the soft glow of the yellow lamp and the silken silence of LeVey's sanctum. Every action, every word, had been perfectly attuned to its setting.

Bannister gazed thoughtfully at the toe of his shoe with which he was subconsciously tracing the pattern of the rug. Yes, he had done this man an injustice. Much as he loathed him—and he did loathe him as much as ever—he had done him an injustice. He raised his head.

"LeVey," he said, rising and advancing a step. Bannister stopped short. The Angora awoke and stretched. As he watched, something within him seemed also to awaken.

"And Miss Carruthers?—You have told her all this?" he asked with unaccountable suspicion. LeVey, confident of the impression he had made, was taken off his guard.

"Her father knows my past. He has given his consent."

"You will tell Miss Carruthers?" inquired Bannister very quietly.

"If her father thinks best—if he sees fit—" His manner was almost cringing.

"You will tell Miss Carruthers." This

time it was no question; it was a command. The icy calmness of it goaded LeVey to frenzy.

"And if I don't?" he spluttered, jumping to his feet. "And if I don't—what then?"

"But you will," Bannister told him deliberately, his steady eyes boring mercilessly into LeVey's very conscience.

"Is this a threat, sir? Is this blackmail?"

"I wonder," said Bannister, reaching for his hat and stick. "I've had so little experience that I'm hardly a fit judge. *Is it?*"

## CHAPTER X

PASSING through the reception room on his way out of the *Chat* offices, Bannister saw an old man loudly expostulating to the haughty Miss Montesque. He was frail and scrawny of body; his frock coat was shiny at the elbows, and the once black soft hat with which he was gesticulating so violently was rusty with age; his white mustache and imperial contrasted sharply with the old ivory of his withered skin and the still older-looking ivory of his teeth; the whites of his malignant little eyes had a yellowish tinge, as though the faded brown of the irises had run over into them; a beak-like nose completed the impression of a molting bird of prey.

"I have already informed you," Miss Montesque told him with quiet firmness, "that Mr. LeVey is not in."

"That makes no difference!" snarled the old man. "I tell you I insist upon seeing him!"

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With a sigh of weariness Miss Montesque calmly picked up her ever present novel and pretended to read. This occasioned a fresh outburst.

Bannister had entered the elevator, and the boy was about to close the door, when the old man, still spluttering angrily, rushed into the car. The repugnant odor of dying absinthe hovered about his muttered indignation. Once again on the sidewalk, Bannister drew a deep breath of fresh air. "Lord, what a place!" he thought.

And now what? he asked himself, as he swung down the Avenue. What should he do next? If Peggy O'Brian were only in town. With all her flippancy, he felt she could tell him what to do. She was Jane's friend, and she would understand. But Peggy was in Washington. Now if only—Someone jostled sharply against his shoulder. He apologized absently. He vaguely realized that a man was blocking his way, and side-stepped to pass him.

"Isn't this Mr. Jones Bannister?" drawled the man with affected formality. "I know your name perfectly, but I never can remember faces."



"Tommy Vanderhof!" exclaimed Bannister with sudden awakening.

"I thought it was you," said Tommy, gingerly feeling his shoulder where Bannister had gripped it. "But you were looking so absent and faraway I couldn't be quite sure."

"But I thought you were out West with Col. O'Brian?"

"Was. Just got back. Denny dropped off at Philadelphia. Went to Washington to get Mrs. Denny. Couldn't wait for her to get back here. Crazy about her. Hard luck."

"Hard luck?"

"Right. Called up her house just now to tell the servants to have everything ready for 'em. Mrs. Denny, herself, answered the 'phone. She's back here. Thought Denny was coming straight through and cut her visit short. Crazy about him. Walk up to the University Club and I'll buy you a cocktail. It may seem a bit early, but I'm still going by Western time, you see."

"No, thanks," laughed Bannister. "Nothing I'd like better than to hang around with you and get a red nose, Tommy, but—"

"Oh, very well," and with a highly injured

air Tommy turned and strode on up the Avenue.

So Peggy was back. Good, thought Bannister. Now he could seek the aid of her nimble fingers in unraveling his tangle. Women were so—so—er—that is, some of them were. Peggy could tell him what to do. He swung his cane briskly as he walked. For, just as dogs when they are happy wag their tails, men, when they are in high spirits, swing their canes.

The nearest telephone was at Thirty-fourth Street. He called up. Mrs. O'Brian had just gone out? He would call up again a little later. Oh, she was lunching out and was not expected home until late?


When he resumed his way down the Avenue all the swing was out of his cane and LeVey was back in his thoughts. Hang it all, he'd go straight to Jane, herself. What if it were speaking ill of a rival. Her whole life was at stake, and he loved her. And what if she would forever loathe him for it? Such was his love for her that even that would not be too great a sacrifice to make for it.

First of all he would have lunch and then he would dress. The former was accom-

plished much more easily than the latter. It is in the great climaxes of a man's life that he thinks most of clothes. An author in San Francisco who was undressed at the time of the earthquake has since said that after the first shock his one overwhelming fear was that the end would come before he could finish dressing. When Michael presented the question of frock coat or cutaway, Bannister, after much deliberation, pronounced in favor of the cutaway. "A frock coat is so undertakerish," he objected. The cutaway was carefully adjusted. He regarded himself in the mirror a bit dubiously. "I don't know, after all. What do you think, Michael? This cutaway makes me look like a robin. I look as if I were going to take four quick hops and then stop short and bob for a worm."

Michael scratched his head. He realized from the attention bestowed upon detail that they were dressing for an occasion of moment. The cutaway it was.

After discarding three perfectly good ties he almost decided upon a pearl gray one—only to cast it aside at the last moment because it was too somber. We cannot wait for



him longer. We have already missed a part of our story as it is.

Mrs. Carruthers, in her room writing letters, heard raised voices in the library below. She put down her pen and let her hand fall in a gesture of despair. "If they only wouldn't," she sighed. Even as a child, Jane's expression of affection for her father had seemed entirely perfunctory. Of late she had become openly antagonistic. This grieved Mrs. Carruthers. She loved her daughter with that peculiar self-love that a mother can bestow, without conscious vanity, upon her own past, living in the present. And she honestly believed that she also loved her husband, just as do many loyal wives who in reality are but cherishing living souvenirs of the men they once did love.

The voices in the library continued. Mrs. Carruthers, unable to stand it longer, arose. As she reached the threshold the door below opened and she heard Jane, with icy distinctness, say:

"Mr. Bannister has said nothing to me. He would not be apt to. But I think I see: While you would believe Mr. Bannister sooner

than you would Mr. LeVey, you would sooner believe Mr. LeVey than you would Mr. Bannister."

With this she closed the door after her and started up to her room. On the stairs she met her mother, and, suddenly throwing her arms about her, impulsively kissed her. For the moment she seemed about to open her heart. She started to say something, but quickly recovered her composure, and with another kiss—this time the conventional, filial one—passed on. "I'm going out, Mother," she called back. "Ellen Martin 'phoned me for tea." A few minutes later Mrs. Carruthers, sitting at her desk, but not writing, heard the front door close after her.

A little later, or perhaps very much later—Mrs. Carruthers was still sitting at her desk and did not notice—Mr. Jones Bannister was announced. The butler, who knew enough to know nothing, was informed that Miss Carruthers was not at home, but that Mrs. Carruthers would be down presently.

Bannister had that natural sympathy of manner that makes a mother forget that it was her daughter he came to see.

"And Mr. Carruthers?" he asked, as

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though that gentleman's health was a matter of real concern to him.

Mrs. Carruthers sighed. "I am so worried about him," she said. "He insists that he is perfectly well, and he will not listen to our having the doctor. But there is such a change. He seems so listless. He no longer takes even the slightest interest in the things about him. Tuesday was our wedding anniversary, and he just sat and brooded, with never a thought of it. He used to make so much of it—he never used to forget." Her eyes were dry but there were tears in her voice.

"When he first came back from New Orleans," she went on, "after that awful time—his brother's dreadful illness and his own nearness to death seemed to have brought him closer to the church—he insisted upon our being married over again by a minister. You see we had eloped the first time, in order to escape the big wedding they had planned for us. Our first marriage was before a Jersey justice. And never a year has gone by since then that he has not planned some little surprise for our anniversaries. Sometimes it was a big dinner party and gorgeous presents for the anniversary of the first wedding; often some

thoughtful little souvenir that just we two could understand to commemorate our second marriage. No matter how much he lost interest in everything else—and he hasn't been the same since Fitzhugh's death—he never forgot—until now. But this time—twenty-five years ago Tuesday we were married—he—he—Mr. Bannister, he *isn't* the same; he *isn't* himself. And Jane—”

Mrs. Carruthers broke off. She remembered Jane's parting words to her father but a little while before when she had so scathingly come to Mr. Bannister's defense. And this clear-eyed, clean cut young man before her now: did he love Jane? was there any understanding between them? Or—

“Jane is such a comfort to me,” she said aloud. “I don't know what I would do without her.” She would give him an opening to confide in her. “But I suppose I must lose her some day, and after all, her happiness is everything to me.” Then loyalty prompted her to add: “—and to Mr. Carruthers.”

Bannister's heart sank. She agreed with her husband, then. She, too, approved of Le-Vey. She was trying in her kindly, gentle

way to tell him of Jane's engagement. He must make it easy for her.

"I—I hope that Jane will always be very, very happy," he said bravely.

It was Mrs. Carruthers whose heart sank now. Then—then he was not in love with Jane; her little girl must suffer. She sighed wearily.

"I will be in to say good-by before I go," he said listlessly.

"You are going away?"

He had not thought of it before he had received the idea from his own words. But why not? "Yes, I am getting restless again," he explained. "I thought I would try my hand at big game." Many men who hunt big game have been driven to it by *the* big game.

"You will tell Jane," he said as he arose to go, "I will be in to say—good-by?"

A wistful expression came into Mrs. Carruthers' eyes as she held out her hand to him. "I will tell her," she said.

He hesitated a moment. "And if there's ever anything I can do, for either you or Jane—no matter what—"

She nodded and gave his hand an understanding little pressure.



Bannister descended the steps and walked toward Fifth Avenue. His head was down, and from time to time he made violent swishes with his stick, as though to kill some unpleasant memory. Something impelled him to look up. Peggy O'Brian, her face alight with amusement, was coming toward him.

"Well?" she questioned, with her voice as well as her whole expression.

"Peggy O'Brian!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "You're the one person in the world I've been looking for all day. Heard you were in town, and tried to get you this morning. Then I tried to get Jane, but she's out, too, and—"

"Oh, then she hasn't just refused you," said Peggy with affected surprise. "I thought from the gloomy length of your face before you saw me, and the desperate joy with which you seized upon me when you did see me— But you say Jane *didn't* just refuse you? I came down to see her, but as long as she's out — Come take me up home and I'll give you a dish of tea. We can walk up to Fourteenth Street and take one of those rickety old taxis at Union Square. They cost just as much as the good ones, but they make you feel so much

more economical while you're riding in them.

"You know Denny will be back from Washington to-night," she chattered on as they strolled up the Avenue. "Did you hear about the absurd way we missed each other?"

"Yes," admitted Bannister, "I saw Tommy Vanderhof this morning."

"Tommy's a dear. My, but you don't know how good it is to be back. I simply loathe Washington. The men are all—well, they're either inattentive or too attentive. That's what I love about Denny—he's so beautifully medium. Oh, dear! I wish we were so rich that I didn't always have to be economizing by traveling about!"

"Economizing by traveling about?" puzzled Bannister. "But as long as you keep your town house open anyhow, I should think—"

"Of course you should. That's because you're a man and don't know anything about it. The household expenses are the smallest part of it. As far as the house is concerned, the only difference between poverty and wealth is the difference between cooking your own roast and roasting your own cook. I've done both. But dress—it's in a woman's clothes that the real difference shows. It's

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like this: Of course it's impossible for a woman to wear the same gown twice in succession in the same set—even a man realizes that. And it's really much less expensive to travel around and change your set than it is to buy new gowns—that is, of course, for a woman who dresses intelligently rather than intellectually. But you're laughing at me; you're just as stupid as Denny."

"You mustn't blame us," Bannister told her. "No one understands women, and men don't come much closer to it than do women themselves."

"Conceited!"

For a while they walked on in silence. Bannister evidently had something he wished to say, but did not know just how to begin. Peggy, considering the sidewalk a most inappropriate place for confidences, did not do anything to help him.

"There's something I've simply got to tell you," he finally blurted out. "Can you keep a secret?"

Peggy pursed her lips.

"I think so," she replied rather doubtfully. "And if I can't," she added cheerfully, "I can always find plenty of people to help me."

Bannister bit his lip and lapsed into silence again.

They engaged the least disreputable looking of the Union Square taxis and rattly-banged up town. The O'Brians lived in that fashionable section of the upper East Side which is so desirable that they have to slice the houses very thin.

"Welcome to these broad acres!" she said with a lordly sweep of her hand when the front door was opened to them.

"And now," she invited when the tea things had been brought and they were comfortably settled, "tell me all about everything that's been going on since I've been away. Tell me about Jane."

Bannister scowled down at the tip of his shoe. "That's why I wanted to see you," he began, hesitatingly. "I thought maybe you could help. It hasn't been formally announced yet, but Jane is engaged to LeVey, and—"

"What! Janie going to marry that beast? She isn't! How do you know? How dare you say that!" she demanded, just as though Bannister were in some way responsible for it.

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"I wish to heaven it wasn't true, Peggy," he said solemnly. "And when you hear the whole story—" He proceeded to tell her what Michael had told him of LeVey's past; of the gossip he had overheard at the club concerning LeVey's engagement to Jane; of his interview with LeVey, himself, and of his call upon Mrs. Carruthers during which she had practically confirmed the reports. "But what could I do? That's why I wanted to see you. I"—a tell-tale color came to his face—"I couldn't very well go to Jane."

Peggy nodded comprehendingly. "No, I suppose not—not if you've been making love to her."

"I don't have to make love to her," confessed Bannister with a plaintive smile. "At the very thought of her it surges up in my heart all ready-made."

Peggy regarded him with approval.

"But you *did* go to see her," she recollected. "I'm glad she was out. Will you leave it to me? Will you promise to keep away from her until you hear from me? Good. And now, I'll see if I can't get her on the 'phone. She surely must be in by this time. I want her to be."

On her way over to the telephone she gently laid a hand on Bannister's arm, and looked up straight into his eyes. "And no matter what happens, Jones Bannister," she said very impressively, "always remember this: While there isn't a man in the whole wide world fit to black Jane Carruthers' boots, before I'd let her marry that snake LeVey I'd—I'd let her marry you," she concluded, wrinkling up her nose at him.

She raised the receiver and gave her number.

"Mr. Carruthers' house? Oh, is that you, Jenkins? This is Mrs. O'Brian. Has Miss Jane—What? . . . What!" The brightness of her face instantly clouded with seriousness. "Yes? . . . Yes?" she kept impatiently repeating. And then: "Tell them that if there's anything I can do— Or wait: I'll be right down. I'm coming now." She slapped the receiver on its hook, gave her hair a quick pat, and started to adjust her hat.

"I'll take the subway— It's quickest," she said as she apparently plunged a long hat pin through her pretty head. "You stay here, 'J,' and if Denny comes before I get back, why,

just tell him all about it. There's whiskey on the sideboard. Good-b—"

"But what *has* happened?" said the utterly bewildered Bannister.

She paused in the doorway a moment, as though amazed at his appalling ignorance. "Why," she said, "Mr. Carruthers has just had a stroke. He isn't expected to live."

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE word "stroke," used by the butler, is misleading. It was neither apoplexy nor paralysis that had befallen Mr. Carruthers. He had been talking to Jane in the library upon her return from tea, and had worked himself into a fine frenzy of excitement. In the middle of it he had suddenly clapped his hand to his heart, and sunk, faint and gasping, to the floor.

Angina pectoris, the doctor had pronounced it. In this, as in the treatment of most ailments of the heart, the only difference between the ordinary doctor and the eminent physician is in the significance of their shrugs when they are questioned. The shrug of the ordinary doctor merely says, "Who can say?" Long years of successful practice enable the eminent physician to imply with the same shrug, "Even I cannot say." The Carrutherses' physician was eminent.

For long hours at a stretch Mrs. Carruthers would sit by her husband's bedside, listening



to the mumbled ramblings of his delirium, or patiently watching over him during the long stretches of listlessness when only his labored breathing seemed to mark the difference between life and death. She had wished to nurse him by herself; she had thought of the gallant young lover who had left everything dear to him to go to his brother's bedside, and who had uncomplainingly and uselessly given his youth as a bribe to Death. But the doctor would not hear of it. There must be trained nurses—two of them. Alone, she would break down under the strain of it. Besides, he cunningly pointed out, Jane needed her.

For Jane, positive that she alone was responsible for this calamity, had worked herself to the verge of a nervous breakdown. To her mother's attempts at consoling her she would not listen. She alone was responsible, she told herself again and again. She might have thought of her mother, if of nothing else. And she *did* pity her father. What he had said to her, what he had asked of her, made no difference. He was now weak and helpless, probably dying; and it was all her doing, all her thoughtless selfishness. For even a woman who is cruel and merciless with words, passing

lightly over the breaking of hearts, will suffer gnawing remorse over the slightest physical hurt, no matter what her justification for inflicting it.

Even Peggy, more like a sister to Jane than sisters often are, was unable to comfort her. Bannister called daily to inquire after the patient's condition and to ask if he could be of service, but Jane, feeling that he was indirectly responsible for the terrible thing she had done, felt that in some way it would be wrong in her to see him. That she wanted to see him gave her a vague sense of satisfaction that she was doing a sort of penance in denying herself his sympathy.

Peggy kept him well informed.

"If that old beast would only get well and nasty again, so that Jane could once more take a normal view of things!" she said one day when she was lunching with Bannister and her husband. "But one thing you can count on, no matter what happens: I am *not* going to let Jane Carruthers marry that LeVey person just as a form of mourning."

"But if they're already engaged," Bannister gloomily reminded her.

"I don't believe it," said Peggy with spirit.

"Jane would have told me if they were. It's just like that lying LeVey to have spread the report himself. The best proof that it isn't so is the fact that he admits it is."

"But—"

"I don't care what you've heard. I don't believe it!"

Col. O'Brian, a great genial, red-faced giant with thick silver-white hair, thoughtfully stroked his chin.

"Bad cess to him!" he muttered. "I don't see how he stands himself. If we could only get something definite on him. But since yer passing compliments with him up in his own malefactory, I suppose that this is out of the question. Now that the shlimey divvil is on his guard he'll be walking straight for a while."

"Oh, I don't think anything I could have said would cause him to change his pace," laughed Bannister. "He'll keep right on, like a man who's been frightened crossing the street, and who keeps on hurrying when he's reached the sidewalk just to prove to himself that he wasn't frightened. The trouble is that it's impossible to prove anything. You ask a man if LeVey is a blackmailer and either he

knows nothing about it and says 'Yes,' or else he has such first hand knowledge of it that he merely stammers surprise and says 'No,' that he's never even heard it hinted at."

"All that has nothing to do with it anyhow," said Peggy, deftly spearing a cherry in the bottom of her lemonade. "Women never let things a man does blind them to what they think he is. The danger with Jane is this absurd remorse she feels. A man cannot understand it. A man thinks he has remorse when he mopes around the house for three days and then buys his wife a perfectly gorgeous diamond souvenir of his misbehavior. When a woman feels remorse she is willing to give everything—even herself. I wish Jane—" What she wished was lost in her attempt to spear the second cherry, which was proving more elusive than the first.


Peggy's fears were justified. Jane, for the first four days after her father's attack, could not bring herself to visit his bedside. She asked after him frequently, eager for any encouragement that what she had done might yet be undone, but she dreaded seeing him. Her mother, understanding something of her feelings, did not urge her at first. But on the

third morning, when the patient was resting quietly, she came to Jane and very gently suggested, "Don't you think—if you could just come for a few minutes—it might—I think he would like to see you, dear."

Jane looked up at her mother's tired eyes and saw the wistful entreaty in them. She tenderly kissed her, and taking her hand, permitted herself to be led.

At the door of the sick-room she left her mother and tip-toed softly over to the bed. For a moment she gazed in silence at the white-faced old man, lying motionless, his wide, lusterless eyes staring vacantly at nothing. A great wave of mingled pity and anguish surged up within her. She had done this; she had made a human being like this.

"Father," she whispered, sinking to her knees and seeking his hand. "Father," she pleaded, "forgive me. I did not understand." Apparently he did not hear. The only sound was his labored breathing. "I did not know," she went on in a whisper tense with entreaty. "But I will do anything. I did not know. I was not sure I loved him; I was not sure I did not love—someone else. But I will be— I am. I did not know."



The sick man seemed to be trying to move. He began to speak: "It's yellow-jack, doctor. . . . Who can tell? . . . —" and then he lapsed into mumbling French.

Mrs. Carruthers came forward and laid her hand on Jane's shoulder. "Come now, dear. I think we had better leave him. This afternoon, perhaps."

But that afternoon LeVey called to inquire after his old friend, and Jane sent word that she would see him. As she came forward, wearily, to greet him, he noted that the creamy lace house gown set off the glory of her burnished hair and that the whiteness of her skin was accentuated by the dark shadows that grief and worry had cast beneath her eyes. Some women seem to have been created for suffering, it occurred to LeVey; it becomes them.

He listened in silence while Jane told him of her father's condition. It was as though he were too deeply affected to trust himself with words.

"Miss Carruthers," he ventured at last, talking to her, but gazing thoughtfully off into space, "I cannot tell you what a shock this has been to me. Your father is not a man who

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has bestowed his friendship widely. Few knew him. For some reason"—a shrug indicated that it was past his understanding—"he saw fit to stretch out his hand to me, a young stranger in a strange land, at a time when— Jane,"—he faced her squarely and spoke with impressive earnestness—"if there were anything in all this wide world that I could do to make your father's affliction lighter; if I knew of any way in which I could bring him happiness—"

He stopped short and with a sudden gesture of helplessness, got up and began to pace the room. The effect was that which he had intended. Jane's mind took up the thread of his words where he had broken off. There was but one thing which could make her father happy—her marriage with LeVey. But when he had seen whither his words were leading, she believed, his delicacy had made him halt. Much as he loved her, and Jane was a woman and knew, he would not take advantage of her affliction to urge his cause.

She arose and stood with her hand resting on the back of her chair. LeVey paused. Their eyes met, his, half-questioning, yet afraid to question; hers, glistening and filled



with gratitude for his considerate delicacy—gratitude which is twin sister to pity in its kinship to love.

“You once told me,” she said with a brave smile, “that it would make him happy if—”

“But surely you know I did not mean— You must not suppose—”

“It—it would make me happy, too, I think,” she told him gently.

He bent low over the hand she held out to him and touched lightly with his lips the tips of her fingers.



## CHAPTER XII

**O**N the same principle that prompts a man to boast, "I never bring my business into my home," New York's women of the street usually seek lodgings far from the districts in which they ply their pitiful trade. And just as the tired business man often finds relaxation from his daily cares in the most inane of frothy musical shows, the street woman, at the nightly end of her bitter toil, seeks relief in the austere respectability of her boarding house.

And these boarding houses are the very essence of respectability. Male callers, even over the telephone, are severely frowned upon. The ostentatiously righteous landlady never betrays the slightest suspicion that Miss Brown isn't really employed on a night switch-board, or that Miss Jones isn't actually kept at the theater until the small hours when the glamour fades so that the dust in the corners begins to show.

Molly Farnum sat in her room in her particular—very particular—boarding house, waiting. That blond man with the shifty little pig eyes—lawyer's clerk, he said he was—had made an appointment for his employer, Mr. Maurice, to call that afternoon. She had been a little distrustful at first, but if the matter really did concern Jones Bannister, as he had told her it did— Dear old Banny-boy!

Her eyes wandered to the large photograph of him on the wall. Yes, he was older than that now, more serious looking, but his eyes were the same. She couldn't exactly express it, even to herself, but most men's eyes were questioning eyes; Banny's were answering eyes. Answering—reassuring; that was it.

Her gaze shifted to the two faded old pictures over her dressing table, portraits of a square-jawed, simple American, seemingly ill at ease in his Sunday clothes; and of a patient looking, sweet faced woman, also a trifle conscious that she was wearing her best. Banny would understand and appreciate them, Molly felt. He was the one of all the men she had met since coming to New York, whose photograph would not have been a jarring note with theirs. He— A knock. Before she had

time to answer, the door opened and the blowzy landlady inserted a head that would have looked immodest without its curl-papers.

"The gen'leman you spoke of is in the parlor." She consulted a visiting card without surrendering it. "Mr. M-a-u-r-i-c-e—Morris. I told him you might be restin'—how your rehearsals kept you late—but that I'd see."

"Tell him I'll be right down," she said, giving her hair a deft pat before the mirror.

"Miss Farnum?" assumed LeVey, arising. Each read the other with the practiced eye of their respective professions. "Snaky," was her mental comment. He, slightly puzzled, could not quite reconcile the girl with the "parlor" and its soiled marble Psyche with one broken wing, its fumed oak mantel clock with embossed leather dial, and the several engravings representing such innocuous scenes as "Am Strande," "Picking Daisies" and "Loin du Pays."

"You wished to see me about Mr. Bannister?" suggested Molly, indicating a chair.

LeVey, choosing his words with the utmost care, as if to do justice to a delicate and difficult subject, began: "It is very good of you

to give me this interview, Miss Farnum, and I sincerely trust that your friendship for Mr. Bannister is still such that we may count upon your help. His uncle, Lloyd Jones, as you must know, was extremely fond of his namesake. But he did not let his affection blind him to Bannister's boyish impressionability, a quality lovable in itself, but one likely to make him the easy victim of—er—those who prey upon the unsophisticated. Upon his deathbed Mr. Jones asked me—I had from time to time enjoyed his confidence in such matters—to exert a friendly interest over—” LeVey, apparently satisfied that Miss Farnum understood, broke off with a characteristic wave of his hand.

“But let us get to the point,” he resumed, assuming an air of absolute frankness. “I know we can trust you, Miss Farnum. The case is simply this: A certain young woman has decided to marry Jones Bannister.” His quick glance caught the slight start she gave. “She cares nothing for him—only for his money. She would make him miserable—ruin his entire life. But he is completely under her spell and unless—Miss Farnum, that is why I have

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come to you. This marriage *must* be stopped. With your help, and only with your help, it can be stopped."

She regarded him, mystified, a little afraid. "But—I do not understand. I—"

"Let me explain. Jones Bannister does not really love this woman—for the present I must withhold her name. So far as I know," with a glance full of significance, "he has never truly loved but one woman. In this case he is but blinded by a passing infatuation. The woman wants his money. She—"

"And is wanting money—" regarding him with narrowed eyes—"is that in itself such an inexcusable offense?"

"By no means." Mistaking her suspicion for greed he began to feel more sure of his ground. "And I am glad to say that in this case the reward for your act of friendship would be a most liberal one—five thousand dollars—perhaps much more. Here is our plan. Some years ago it was you to whom Bannister was devoted. It was thought that you were actually engaged. Who knows? Perhaps you were. I do not ask. But assuming that you were: Do you not see that by now suing him for breach of promise—fifty thousand—

even one hundred thousand—he could not go on with this unfortunate marriage until the thing were definitely cleared up? And the woman— No, no; hear me out: It takes very little evidence for a beautiful woman to convince a jury. Why, aside from the personal interest I take in saving my old friend's nephew, I would be willing, simply as a business proposition, to take the case myself and guarantee you five thousand dollars, win, lose, or compromise. You see?"

"I think I do," Molly told him very quietly. "As I understand it you want me to sue Mr. Bannister for breach of promise. You would furnish the lawyers and gather the evidence. And for this you would pay me five thousand dollars?"

LeVey nodded.

"Mr. Maurice," said Molly, getting up, "I thank you."

"You accept, then?" inferred LeVey, holding out his hand. She failed to see it. "It is all settled then? And when—?"

She had started toward the door, but paused and faced him squarely. "Mr. Maurice, I do not think I can ever make you understand how much this has meant to me. But I am going

to try. My story is a pitiable common one. It is the old story of the girl from the little town who thinks she has talent and comes to the city to develop it. For a time, perhaps, she succeeds a little and sends back money to the father and mother who have made sacrifices for her. Then things do not go so well. She is ashamed to admit defeat. And then the glitter and everything— And she still sends a little money back home each week. After a while—but I think you know. Your eyes look as if you knew. The girl's old parents would forgive everything, even if they knew, and welcome her with open arms—but— Well, the other night I met Jones Bannister on the street. It was the first time I had seen him in years. I'd forgotten that there were men like him—men who give more than they take. He made me want to be clean and decent again. I'd have given my life to have been able to go back home. But I felt that I wasn't worthy." Suddenly her eyes flashed and she spoke with withering scorn: "But now that I've met you—I *am* clean; I *am* decent—by comparison. Ugh!—I've sold only my body. I almost respect myself. Thank you."

## CHAPTER XIII

**B**REAKFAST having been announced, Bannister slipped into a gaudy dressing gown of purple silk decorated with great circular splotches of pale blue and tan, and slouched into his dining room. He liked that dressing gown, he explained to his friends, because it made everything else seem in such good taste, and he was particularly sensitive to beauty early in the morning.

While he was sipping his coffee he stole a critical glance at Michael from time to time. The man's hand was steadier this morning—yesterday he had dropped an egg, and Bannister had his eggs boiled only two minutes. And his eyes had more of their customary twinkle, although they were still a bit blood-shot.

“Michael,” said Bannister severely, “you know I’ve never questioned your habits off duty, and in a way I suppose it’s none of my business, but haven’t you been—er—drinking a good deal lately?”



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"I have, sir," Michael promptly confessed. "But I don't regret it. I'd gladly do that and more for you. What with all ye've done for me, 'twould be the ongrateful hound I'd be not to."

Bannister looked at Michael questioningly. He started to say something, but thought better of it. Experience had taught him that the quickest way to get an explanation from Michael was to let it take its course.

"For four nights I was at it strong with 'em," he finally volunteered, "but there was no getting anything out of them any more than there was any getting anything out of me. So I cut out goin' to George's place, and when I wanted a quiet glass or two by meself I'd slip into the dago joint on the other corner. 'Twas there I met this old fellow."

"You mean that these men of LeVey's are still trying to pump you about me?"

"Yes, sir. It's a different pair now, but I could spot their kind a mile off with me eyes shut. Well, 'twas over across the street I ran into this old fellow I'm tellin' ye about. He's some sort of a furriner by the looks an' the talk of him. After we'd been drinkin' together for a while I noticed there's a washed-

out pink rat of a man sort of edgin' up to us all the time, just close enough to hear what we're sayin'. The old fellow noticed it, too, an' suddenly wheeled 'round like a flash, an', with a low bow, says he: 'Pray presint me compliments to yer friend Mr. LeVey, an' tell him I hope to pay me disrespects in person before long.' Well, sir, ye could have knocked me down with a feather. The pink rat gulps down his drink an' slinks out of the place like a—well, like the pink rat that he was.

"'LeVey?' says I in astonishment. But the old man pretended not to hear me, an' went on tellin' me how they cooked oysters in some place down in New Orleans. I tried to empty him by gettin' him full, but he wouldn't talk while he could, an' by the time he would he couldn't. That was the night before last, sir."

"What did he look like?" asked Bannister, much puzzled. "Couldn't you find out anything about him?"

Michael scratched his head for descriptive phrases.

"He's a little man about the color of a meer-schaum pipe—when it *is* that color. An' he has a white cotton battin' mustache with a tassel on his chin to match. Last night I ran


across him again in the same place, but he seemed sort of suspicious of me as if he was wondering how much his tongue had told me the night before when he'd been too busy drinkin' to keep track of it. But I found where he lived, sir," announced Michael in triumph. "It took me over half the night doin' it, but I found where he lived! An' that's what I wanted to ask you about, sir. If ye could spare the time to-day, I thought ye might take the automobile, an', just to make my bein' with ye more natural, I could go as yer chauffeur."

"Why, I didn't know you could run a car?" said Bannister, wondering just what Michael was getting at.

"Nor can I. But I've often seen gentlemen change seats with their men to take a turn at the wheel themselves, an' I thought—"

"But where do you want to go?"

"If ye'll jest wait, sir, 'til after we've finished yer dressin', I'll change back into the shirt I wore last night. I've git it all down, as nate as ye please, on me cuff. When I got through with him I went in the corner drug store an' figured it out on the map in the front of the city directory."



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In spite of the curiosity he naturally felt, Bannister could not bear to ask the questions that would strip the affair of its air of mystery so dear to the Celtic heart. He 'phoned for his car and meekly submitted to the clothes Michael selected for him, even the wine-colored velvet waistcoat, the fitness of which for various occasions had always been a matter for silent debate between them. Michael changed his shirt.

Servants received their orders in silence; chauffeurs merely keep from talking. Bannister's, when told he would not be needed the rest of the day, raised his eyebrows in an expression of tolerant contempt for a gentleman who would go motoring with his servant.

The plan of campaign on Michael's cuff led them into Madison Avenue and straight uptown. After interminable going, just as Bannister was beginning to wonder if Manhattan really were an island, they crossed a bridge into that part of the city which is the godfather of the Bronx cocktail. Their progress here was naturally slower, for as they went on, strange names of roads and avenues began to vie with street numbers for possession of the

lamp-post signs, and Michael was forced to consult his cuff more and more frequently.

The buildings began to lose their uniformity. Now and then they passed a tall, gaunt tenement, standing by itself as though waiting for others to line up beside it. Next to one of these, like as not, was a squatty old frame house that looked as though it might have gently crumbled down a story or two; or, perhaps, two or three of those dwellings of a later vintage when the fashion was those tri-colored slate mansards now held in such ridicule by people who buy mission furniture; power house, factory, row of Queen Anne cottages—it was as if each real estate owner had made his individual guess as to the ultimate character of the section, and they had all been wrong.

There were vacant lots with enough cans in them to make placer mining for tin profitable. Once, a rosy-cheeked Italian girl with a bright red flower in her hair waved a smile to them from her gate. But when the car was stopped to enable Michael to consult his cuff, she hastily found business in the truck garden back of the cottage.

At last they came to a fine broad macadam avenue which had been graded high above the

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level of the paint-barren old frame houses that had bordered the original road. Most of the owners of these had managed to escape complete isolation from the outside world by deepening their second story or third story windows into doorways and connecting them with the new sidewalks by means of wooden bridges.

Just as they were in danger of colliding with Michael's cuff button, according to the penciled diagram on his cuff, they veered off at the end of the button-hole into a winding country road full of depressions and oppressions. Around the first bend they passed an ancient dwelling, jacked up on rollers, apparently halting for a moment's rest in its futile flight from the steadily pursuing city improvements.

"Why, I remember this!" said Bannister, stopping the car as he recognized a miniature Colonial house with its Greek façade barely showing above a gorgeous tangle of flowers, shrubs and vine-clad arbors. A beware-of-the-dog sign near the white picket gate seemed to have been effective in keeping the hob-nailed foot of Progress from trampling down the beauty of the place. "My uncle used to bring me up here Sundays when I was a boy, and tell me all about the revolution. Why, he used

to walk me over territory in a single day that had taken Washington and the British two weeks of forced marches to cover. And let's see, there used to be a little French road-house just down— Why, there it is still—La Solitude!"

"Faith, an' that's the place I've been bringin' ye to," exclaimed Michael, with a trace of disappointment that all his pains had been unnecessary.

"Well, it's certainly a good thing you made your diagram, then," soothed Bannister, starting the car again. "What with all these changes I'd certainly never have found it by myself."

They drew up before a weather-beaten group of buildings that seemed to have huddled together for mutual warmth and protection. A veil of uniform dilapidation kept them from seeming incongruous. On the largest and most central of the buildings the faded ghosts of one-time painted letters spelled out the name "La Solitude."

Bannister tooted his horn. A white-aproned little Frenchman came running forth with effusive little bows and gestures of welcome. From the flourish with which he swung

back the rickety old gate to the driveway one gathered the impression that he must have spent his whole lifetime expectantly awaiting these particular guests.

They ran the car into the tumble-down carriage shed and followed the proprietor—for he had assumed proprietorship over them, no matter what his position in the establishment—through a wooden arch, into the house that served as dining room. This he placed at their disposal with a comprehensive wave of his hand.

“Messieurs will eat within?” he suggested, sustaining the question with raised eyebrows. The only occupants of the room were a nondescript youth and a gaudily dressed woman whose tired eyes looked as though they could see nothing in the future but her past.

Michael scratched his head and, stepping back from the door, gazed out over the grounds in the rear.

“It’s such an illigant day,” he said. “I was wonderin’ if one of them little tables down by the river—”

“By all means,” agreed Bannister.

“As m’sieur wishes,” said the Frenchman with a shrug which indicated that there was




no accounting for tastes. He, himself, would have preferred the dining room, which was the very next building to the kitchen.

Green wooden tubs that had once contained plants dotted the grounds beneath the tall, graceful elms. Here and there stretches of green lattice work, hiding nothing, pierced with Gothic arches, leading nowhere, lent to the place that mysterious charm of an unknown beyond.

"Do you still make those wonderful mushroom omelettes?" asked Bannister as they walked toward the farthest row of tables. "Good. And a nice crisp salade with entirely too much oil—and the bread-crusts of garlic—the way they used to make it here. And what would you like to drink, Michael?"

But Michael's attention was all upon a wizened little old man with his elbows on the table and his chin resting in his palms. An emptied glass stood in front of him. He was gazing vacantly out at the shrunken little stream, Bronx River by courtesy, that feebly wound its way out from between the gray stone walls of crumbling buildings above, wavered in within a few feet of them in passing, and finally disappeared in the high rocky banks below.



"Don't look; that's him," whispered Michael excitedly. "But don't look; he might suspect. We must approach him accidental like."

But Bannister had already looked, and although he could not see the old man's face he had a vague feeling of familiarity with it.

"A nice cup, then," the waiter decided, since no one else seemed to offer any suggestion; "made with Pontet Canet, m'sieur. A half bottle? or a quart?"

"Yes, yes—a quart," Bannister hastily assured him, and he bustled off toward the main building.

Michael seated himself with his back toward the old man. By holding his handkerchief against the glasses of his motor goggles he was able to improvise a mirror by which he could watch him in a very much more mysterious manner than if he had sat directly facing him.

"I think he's dhrunk still—or again," decided Michael after a few moments' critical observation. "'Tis all right, now. If ye have no objections to me bringin' him over, I think if we handle him with diplomacy—" In response to Bannister's amused "Go ahead" he arose and started for the buildings. When he had gone a few yards he turned and called

back, "Did ye say brandy, sir, or absinthe?"

The old man awoke from his reverie with a start and raised his head. An expression of utmost surprise came into Michael's face. He beamed with recognition and strode gladly over to him.

The enthusiasm of their meeting was entirely Michael's. The old man, in response to something he was saying, turned to look at Bannister. He had a coffee colored face and little yellow eyes that accentuated the whiteness of his mustache and imperial. He—There flashed across Bannister's mind a picture of the drunken old man at the *Chat* offices noisily demanding LeVey. Michael had apparently succeeded in persuading the old man to come over. Bannister arose to meet them.

"Mr. Bannister, this is the gentleman—er—Ye remember I was tryin' to tell ye the wonderful way they cook oysters in New Orleans —"

"Lamoissant, suh—Dr. Lamoissant," the old man volunteered with a courtly bow. "I am honored in makin' your acquaintance, suh."

Michael brought up a chair for him, and Bannister invited him to lunch with them. He

protested that he had just finished breakfast, but, since Mr. Bannister insisted, he would join them in an *aperatif*—a little absinthe. "Gaston understands how I wish it," he called after Michael as the latter started toward the house to give the order.

"Your chauffeur, *suh*?" asked Lamoissant, indicating Michael.

"Yes, he's my man," Bannister told him; "and my friend as well. I don't know what I should do without Michael."

Lamoissant nodded his head with grave approval. "As someone has said, or should have said if he hasn't," he solemnly observed, smothering a hiccough, "a gen'leman is the superior of his equal, an' the equal of his inferiors. It is an honor, *suh*,"—instinctively reaching for a glass—"to drink with a gen'leman."

"He's coming with them now," Bannister assured him.

When they had been some time at luncheon, Lamoissant, who had started on his second absinthe, kept glancing at Bannister with a puzzled expression, as though trying to place where he had seen him before.

"At the *Chat* offices," Bannister, smiling,

replied to his unspoken question. "I had been there to see LeVey. You were inquiring for him just as I came out."

Lamoissant glanced up sharply. His malignant little eyes narrowed with suspicion. "You know LeVey, then? He is a friend of yours?"

"Friend! LeVey a friend of mine? Why, before I'd trust Morris Levey, or whatever he calls himself, I'd—I'd—" Bannister broke off with a snap of his fingers, as though no words were adequate.

Lamoissant, reassured, took a long swallow of his drink.

"I should think," ventured Michael, innocently gazing at nothing in the top of a tall elm, "now that he's goin' to get married—"

He was interrupted by Bannister's foot pressing sharply against his own.

"Wha's that?" Lamoissant demanded excitedly. "Who says LeVey's goin' to ge' married?"

Michael drew his feet safely up under his chair, and, ignoring his master's silencing gesture, persisted: "Faith an' it's all over town that they're engaged. They can't announce it

yet on account of old man Carruthers bein' so sick. If he dies—"

"Michael!"

"Sir?"

"C'ruthers!" exclaimed Lamoissant. His jaw dropped in amazement, as though some great light had suddenly burst upon his fuddled brain. He looked first at Michael, then at Bannister, in mute appeal. "LeVey is going to marry ol' Tom C'ruthers' daughter, is he? So that's it; tha's his little game," he muttered, sententiously nodding his head.

"You seem to know Mr. Carruthers," suggested Bannister with studied carelessness.

"Know 'm like a book; but he don' know I do," the old man mumbled with a drunken chuckle. Then, as it occurred to him that he might be acting indiscreetly, he drew himself up with an air of great dignity and asked, "Wha' say?"

"Nothing. I just thought from the way you spoke that Mr. Carruthers might be a friend of yours.

"I did know him years ago, suh, in New Orleans. Knew his brother, too, suh. Knew 'em both. Knew Tom, knew Fitzhugh; knew

Fitzhugh, knew Tom—knew *everything*,” he concluded with a sweep of his hand that took in the whole wide world, incidentally upsetting a glass or two on the way. He crumpled limply back in his chair. Just as he seemed about to go to sleep some reminiscence curled his mouth into an evil smile. He opened his eyes and leered across the table at Bannister. Then, with the confidential manner of a disgusting old man about to tell an improper anecdote, he very deliberately recited:

“Two brothers who lived in Cape Cod,  
Like as two peas in a pod.  
Said each to th’ other,  
‘Am I You? Or his brother?  
An’ which head is yours?—Make it nod.’”

This last with a maudlin wink, from which he did not reopen his eye. Instead he slowly closed the other eye, too. This time he did go to sleep.

Bannister had been regarding him with ill-concealed disgust. Of a sudden his face became alight with eagerness. Some ray of real significance seemed to have burned its light into him through the fog of Lamoissant’s incoherent ramblings.

"Lamoissant!" he said sharply. "Dr. Lamoissant!"

"Yep," hiccupped the doctor. "Knew 'm well," he mumbled in his sleep. It was obviously hopeless to attempt to rouse him. Bannister turned to Michael.

"What did you get out of him the other night, Michael? What did he say to you?"

"Whist!" cautioned Michael, raising his finger to his lips. "Nothin' much that I could rightly understhand," he whispered, anxiously looking about him. "But if ye'll wait till we get back—'twould be safer at home, sir—I'll tell ye what it was that first aroused me suspicions that ye might like to talk with him. Of course he can't hear us now, but ye can never be too sure. I've often noticed that when they're this way their brains are like phonograph records; they sort of take down impressions like without understhandin', an' when they get over it, an' their brains begin to work again, ye can't tell what they may find tucked away on 'em. Ye see—"

"Then call Gaston, and we'll get back at once," said Bannister impatiently.

When he had settled their bill, and they were preparing to leave, Bannister began to have



qualms of conscience about leaving the old man in his present condition.

"He'll be all right here?" he asked the waiter. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"M'sieur le docteur? Assuredly, m'sieur." Gaston regarded the gently snoring Lamoissant with mild interest for a moment, and then added, quite as though he were passing upon the weather: "But he is early to-day; upon some days it is not until four or five o'clock."



## CHAPTER XIV

**M**RS. CARRUTHERS, worn and pale from her long vigil, listlessly took the letter from the butler's tray.

"The same man brought it, ma'am, as I 'ad such a time with yesterday. The old man with the white mustache and the goatee who wouldn't give 'is name. And I think, ma'am, — 'e appeared to 'ave been drinking again to-day."

Mrs. Carruthers dismissed him with a weary nod and glanced at the envelope. It was addressed, in fine, wavering writing, to Mr. Carruthers. After a moment's indecision she tore it open and unfolded the single sheet of faintly ruled paper.

"Mr. Thomas Carruthers," it read. The letters "Fitzh" had been written before the "Thomas" and then crossed out. "I knew you well when you were sick, and I knew you even better when you became well. Do you remember the young doctor who attended your poor brother (or was it you?) in New Orleans? I

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ask you to, for he is in sore straits, and you still owe him \$1000 for professional services. 'La Solitude, Olden Road, Bronx,' will reach him. With best wishes for a speedy recovery, I am still, Yr. obt. servant, Louis Lamoissant, M.D."

A puzzled expression clouded her face. It was not so much what the note said, though that was strange enough; it was what it left unsaid that troubled her. There was a hint of something sinister between the lines which she could feel without understanding. She read it again, more searchingly. At last, unable to solve it, she arose with a sigh and returned to the sickroom. Softly opening the door, she paused on the threshold. Jane was sitting at the bedside, her head bowed, her hand resting soothingly over the sick man's.

"You must *not* marry him," he was saying vehemently. Though his eyes were staring at the ceiling, he seemed to be making an effort to turn toward her. His lips opened and closed without sound, as though too impatient to wait for his voice to form the words. At last it came again: "You—you *must not* marry him. Promise me."

"Yes, Father; yes. I will never marry

him," Jane gently assured him. "And now you must try to be quiet."

"He is a scoundrel! I did not mean it. He forced me into it. Oh, God!" he groaned with something like a sob. "He—he made me— But you *must* not— Promise me— I have enough to suffer for without that."

Mrs. Carruthers laid her hand gently on her daughter's shoulder. "Now, dear, don't you suppose if you were to go to your room and lie down you could get a few moments' rest? I'll be with him now, and Miss Morrill will be back before long."

"You'll let me know, Mother," Jane said, rising reluctantly, "if— Whenever you want me, you'll—"

"Yes, dear, I'll let you know. But there won't be anything. And do try to get a little rest."

The sick man moved uneasily. He seemed to be clutching for breath. "Tom!" he called. "Tom—wait!" he pleaded.

It startled her, hearing him call his own name. It was as though his body were calling to his spirit, impatient to be off.

"Tom," she said anxiously, "don't you know me? I am your wife—Mary."

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"You *are* my wife! Mary *is* my wife!" he said in protest to some imaginary denial. "We were married—in church. She *is* my wife! Mary." He turned his head toward her. The veil of delirium melted from his eyes. "Mary, Mary," he pleaded, reaching out for her hand. "God forgive me! But I did care—I did care, Mary." He spoke with difficulty, and his voice became so low that it was only by bending close to him that she could understand his words. Her face became white, her body tense. She withdrew her hand from his and pressed it to her forehead. As he talked on, anguish and remorse gave place to each other in his eyes. His voice was filled with pleading and contrition. He reached out appealingly for her hand. Apparently she did not see.

"But I did care!" he exclaimed. The wild light of delirium flared up in his eyes again. "I did marry her! Tom!" He clutched convulsively at the bedclothes. "Tom, I did care!"—his voice trailed feebly off into a vast silence, and he lay very still, staring wild-eyed at the ceiling.

When, almost half an hour later, Miss Morrill, the nurse, tiptoed into the room, Mary

Carruthers lifted her head from her hands and slowly arose.

"He has been very quiet," she said in an awed whisper. "I think— Is he breathing?"

The following morning Maurice LeVey was sitting limply huddled back in the great carved oak chair in his sanctum. His chin was sunk upon his chest and he was frowning thoughtfully. On the table in front of him lay opened a letter that Jane Carruthers had written him the night before. The vibrant purring of the fluffy Angora cat on the bookshelves sounded loud in the silence. LeVey subconsciously protested against it with a nervous twitch of his hand. He reached for Jane's letter and read it through a second time:

*"My dear Mr. LeVey,*

"As you will know by the time this reaches you,"—here a word, it looked like "my," had been crossed out—"death came this afternoon. When I promised to marry you, I thought it was because *I* cared. But I find I was deceived by my belief—which was also your belief—that he very much wished it. He did not wish it. Before he died he made this clear to me and to my mother. It is difficult to tell you this at this time, but it would be even more difficult were we to go on under our present misunderstanding. I

am sure you will agree with me. I trust that I have not given you pain, and that if ever I have need of you you will permit me to call upon you as a friend.

"Yours very sincerely,

"JANE CARRUTHERS."

LeVey sat scowling. What had Carruthers told? Surely he wouldn't— LeVey broke the thought off with a shrug. He had known of men who, willing to die rather than have certain things told while they were living, had themselves willingly told these same things when they were dying. But even if Jane had never really loved him she had thought she loved him. Of that he was sure. And when a woman mistakes some counterfeit emotion for the genuine, the one informant who can convince her of her self-deception is love, itself.

"Damn Bannister!" snarled LeVey, savagely crumpling the letter into a little ball and flinging it from him. He got up and began to pace the floor. He remembered his first sight of Bannister, standing with Jane by the water's edge, watching that glorious Bermuda sunset. He remembered him on ship board—the ship he had taken because she was taking it. And the night that he had bared his soul

to her through his violin—even then Bannister had been sitting by her side. His appeal to *her* had been heard by *them*. It was as though Bannister were ever there by right of birth, by some circumstance beyond human shaping, while he, LeVey— It was unjust! It was cruelly unjust!

There was someone at the door. He drew his hand wearily across his forehead as though to smooth out his agitation, and pulled back the latch.

“That same man wants to see yeh again,” said the weedy office boy when he had closed the door behind him. “That ol’ felleh wit’ the gray mous-tache an’ the—Doctor La-Lam—yeh, that’s it—Lammersent. Miss Montesque told him yeh wasn’t in, but he won’t go, an’ he’s gettin’ noisy about it.”

LeVey frowned, and the boy began plucking nervously at his fingers.

Lamoissant had been seen when he was drunk talking to Bannister’s man, Michael. But even if he had talked too much, LeVey knew that Bannister would say nothing that would bring disgrace or pain to the woman he loved, even though he had lost her.


“Tell him that— Or no, wait a minute.”



If Lamoissant would talk to Bannister's man, he would talk to others. Of course, at his present pace the old scoundrel could not live very long—a year at the outside, perhaps. Still, LeVey had thought that same thing five years ago. No, it was not safe. They must get Lamoissant out of the way—to some other place, if possible; to—no other place, if necessary. He shuddered. He did not like that; he had a horror of death, even in others. Perhaps, now that old Carruthers was dead, he could persuade him—

“Oh, well,” he told the boy, with a bored air, “I suppose I may as well see what he wants and have it over with. Show him in.”

While the boy was gone he glided about with cat-like movement, making sure that the double window behind the heavy velour curtains was tightly closed, turning down the light in the big yellow lamp a trifle, putting away certain papers and rearranging others. He picked Jane's letter from the floor, smoothed it out, and shoved it into his pocket. Then he tenderly took down the black case from the bookshelves, and, a moment later, when Lamoissant was shown into the room, he was standing before the dozing Angora, lightly



plucking an air of old Provence on his violin.

Lamoissant stood staring at him. LeVey, seemingly feeling a presence in the room, turned.

"Ah, Doctor Lamoissant," he said in gentle surprise. "Pray be seated."

But Lamoissant only continued to stare while LeVey caressingly replaced his fiddle in its black resting place. This done, he seated himself in the big chair at the table. "Well?"

"They told me you were out," accused Lamoissant. When he spoke LeVey sensed a faint aroma of liquor.

"I always leave word that I am out when I am busy."

"Busy? Fiddling?"—with a sneer.

LeVey nodded. "Pleasure is a business with me, just as business is a pleasure."

Lamoissant felt that they were drifting from the object of his visit.

"Carruthers is dead," he blurted out.

"I had heard. But I thank you for coming to tell me. It is very sad."

Lamoissant, quivering with anger, stepped menacingly forward.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "I want my money! Now that it's all over, I want my

money. I told you about this man Carruthers. I told you how when his brother came down to nurse him the brother died and this one came North and took his place—his wife, his fortune, and everything!”

“Merely a suspicion on your part,” LeVey reminded him in the tone one would use in making things clear to a child. “You must remember that they looked very much alike. If even the wife of one of them was unable to tell them apart, is it likely that a young doctor who was dismissed for drunkenness from the case should be able to do better? Mind you, I make no insinuations, but to an outsider, might not the motive of revenge—”

“I tell you I knew Fitzhugh Carruthers well,” persisted the old man sullenly. “And I only saw the other brother once. Yet when he met me after he was supposed to have recovered he nodded to me, and forgot and called me ‘Louis.’ And when he realized his blunder he was covered with embarrassment, and pretended not to see me. I tell you I know it was Fitzhugh.”

LeVey shrugged as though the matter were of little interest to him one way or the other. “You have no proof,” he yawned.

"Proof? I have the proof that you were able to get money out of him and give me half. An' by Gawd, suh,—!"

LeVey stopped him with a languid gesture of protest. "Did it ever occur to you," he drawled, "that Mr. Carruthers was my very dear friend? That for a while I might have thought there was something in this story of yours, and that I paid you money out of my own pocket merely to protect my friend? That afterwards, when I found out that you were—er—mistaken, let us say, I no longer saw any reason for paying you—er—money?"

"You lie!"

"I don't see just how you can prove that, either." LeVey pursed his lips thoughtfully and began tapping his finger-tips together. "You might have asked Mr. Carruthers, of course, but he is dead. And I am almost certain he would have denied it. You might ask me. I deny it. I really don't see—" A low purring growl from the Angora on the bookshelves caused him to glance over his shoulder.

Lamoissant pounded his fist down on the table with a bang that made LeVey turn with a jerk. His face went white as death. He was staring into the round, black muzzle of a re-

volver. His lips parted, but no word came.

In Lamoissant's eyes shone the fire of a new determination. There was a new steadiness in his hand. It was as though he had absorbed the courage, the self-confidence, which had gone out from LeVey. He shoved a chair up to the table with his foot.

"And now, M'sieur LeVey, if you will make yourself seated on this side of the table," he ordered with gloating politeness. "Slowly—watch the gun— So. One can not be sure what little signal buttons and bells you have over there by your chair—and you are shaking so I feared you might by accident tremble against one before I was ready."

"P-put down your gun," implored LeVey with a shudder. "It may go off!"

"I had thought of that, but if it did it would not matter. It would disturb no one. This room is absolutely sound-proof. A dynamite explosion, and they would not hear it on the other side of the door. You, yourself, assured me of this when I first came here with my little story. Is it not so?"

LeVey was staring at the muzzle of the revolver, fascinated, and did not answer.

"By our agreement you owe me two thou-

sand dollars." His eyes narrowed shrewdly as he continued with a sneer: "It makes nothing to me that you may have chosen to accept something other than money for your share. If Carruthers' daughter—"

"Take care!" LeVey flashed angrily. Then, as the gun was thrust into his face, he helplessly subsided again.

"I will take care—that I get my money!"

"Oh, well," LeVey sighed. "I seem to have no choice. I suppose I may as well send it to you and have it over with."

"You will give it to me now!"

"But there is no such amount in the house. I will—"

"Send out. Press the button for your boy and send out. I will stay here with my gun in my pocket—pointing at you. So. And mind you: one false move, one— God, I almost hope you do!" He shoved his face close to LeVey's and bared his teeth at him. "Much as I need money—I'm not sure—I think I'd rather kill you! Make out your check—ring for your boy—before I *do* kill you. You scum!"

A minute later LeVey, his eyes on Lamoisant's coat pocket, held out a check to the boy

he had summoned. "Ask Mr. Danielson to take this to the bank at once and have it cashed," he said dully.

"With one hundred dollars in small bills," suggested Lamoissant, his eyes never leaving LeVey.

When the door closed they did not speak. LeVey still sat staring at Lamoissant's pocket, and Lamoissant, his face distorted with hatred, still stood glaring at LeVey. At last the money was brought.

"Count it out to me," ordered Lamoissant.

LeVey counted, "—nineteen hundred and seventy, eighty, ninety, ninety-five, two thousand."

"Count it again," snarled Lamoissant. LeVey glanced up at him. There was a wild, insane something in his eyes which made his victim quail.

"Count it again!"

LeVey counted.

"Hand it to me." He took it in his left hand. "Strike a match."

LeVey, wondering, obeyed. Lamoissant held out the bills until the corners touched the flame and caught fire. LeVey involuntarily reached forward to seize them, but Lamoissant

struck down his hand with the revolver. He took a step or two backward and then suddenly flung the burning bills from him into the empty fireplace.

"There, damn you!" he cried, whirling on LeVey and leveling his revolver. "That proves that it is not the money; that it is only because—I—hate—you!" With the last word the gun spat fire.

LeVey clasped his hand to his heart. With the sharp report all Lamoissant's heroics had left him. He staggered forward, staring dully at what he had done.

"LeVey!" he whispered hoarsely. "LeVey!" His fingers relaxed and the revolver fell upon the table.

Hatred flashed in LeVey's eyes. He slowly reached out toward the revolver. His hand closed over it. And then he fell forward, face upon the table.

At last, with an effort, Lamoissant pulled himself together. He noted LeVey's fingers clutching the revolver, and smiled faintly. He glided stealthily over to the fireplace and peered into it. Four or five of the yellow-backed bills had separated from the others when he had flung them, burning, from him.



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Of these only the edges were charred. He quickly gathered them up and crammed them into his pocket. Then, with an awed last look at the silent motionless thing by the table, he left.

Mr. LeVey, he told them in the outer office, had asked them to say that he did not wish to be disturbed.

The Angora cat on the top of the bookshelves remained cowering in the far corner, its eyes glowing weirdly in the subdued yellow lamp light. At last, after what would have seemed ages were not the only other creature in the room now measuring time by eternity, she very cautiously ventured forward along the top shelf. Nothing happened. She ventured a little farther. Still nothing happened. A little farther. Now she was almost opposite the motionless figure at the table. She meowed softly, then paused. She meowed again. No response. Making sure of her footing with cat-like deliberation, she leaped. By chance she landed upon the slight hump in the heavy oriental rug, so that a buzzer on the floor below indicated to Mr. Skeer that Mr. LeVey wished to see him.

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## CHAPTER XV

**B**ANNISTER was in his rooms reading the first hurried reports of LeVey's death in the evening papers. He had sent Michael out for later editions with more detailed accounts.

"Society Leader LeVey a Suicide" was the glaring headline in one of the yellow journals. Bannister smiled grimly as he noted that the letters were crowded so that at first glance the name appeared "LEVEY." Born Levey, the man had struggled a whole life-time to make himself something else, only, in the end, to die Levey as he had begun.

According to the papers the suicide was discovered by S. G. Skeer, General Manager of the E. F. Jones Detective Agency, who had from time to time done work for Mr. LeVey in investigating news items that were brought into *Chat*. Mr. Skeer had been summoned from his office on the floor below by an electric buzzer connecting with Mr. LeVey's sanctum. When he entered, LeVey was dead at his desk, the revolver with which he had killed himself

still clutched in his hand. The fact that no shot was heard either by Mr. Skeer or by those in the *Chat* offices was explained, according to the papers, by the fact that Mr. LeVey, always extremely sensitive to the slightest distracting noise, had had his sanctum so constructed as to render it absolutely sound-proof.

Bannister remembered the room well. While he was constructing the scene in his mind, he heard a key turn in the hall door, and Michael, face alight with excitement, entered with the cautious tread of a stage conspirator.

"Misther Bannister," he half-whispered. "Could ye get yer hat an' come with me to the corner? The old docthor— The papers weren't up yet, an' I just dhropped in a minute to wait for 'em. He's there now, an' I thought—"

"I'm with you, Michael," Bannister assured him, picking up his hat and preparing to follow. As he was about to ring the elevator bell, Michael raised his hand in protest.

"If ye don't mind, sir, we'll go down by the stairs," he whispered. "Now that LeVey's dead— Heaven rest 'im!— I don't suppose it matters; but I know his men have been to the boy downstairs, an' I don't trust him. I

notice he watches ye every time ye go out, an' if he saw us leavin' the house together—"

They tip-toed down the stairs. On the second floor Michael pressed the elevator bell as they were passing.

"I always bring him up on me way down," he explained with an air of great cunning, "an' then there's no one in the hall to see who's goin' out."

The saloon to which Michael piloted his master contained an ornately framed lithograph of a buxom milk-maid returning from the pasture with a basket of her favorite brand of champagne; a scrawny black cat, patiently waiting near the free lunch counter for some sketchy eater to spill, and all the rest of the things invariably found in just such a saloon.

It being Saturday afternoon, the long bar was lined with patrons. A lanky, hollow-chested man with white strips of adhesive plaster radiating from a bandage on his nose, was loudly explaining to the bartender:

"Fight nothin'. I was tryin' to walk between two lamp-posts that I seen double."

The noisy guffawing which followed this shows that under the proper conditions it is considered very comical.

Bannister saw Lamoissant, drunkenly swaying against the rail at the farther end of the bar.

"Slip in here an' have a lager by ourselves first, sir," counseled Michael. "It might attract notice if we made right for him."

"Yours, gents?" asked the bartender briskly.

"Gimme a shell o' suds," ordered Michael.

"Same," risked Bannister.

While they were drinking their beer, Bannister surveyed the line of faces reflected in the long mirror back of the bar. Here and there was a clear-eyed laborer who had stopped in on his way from work for a well earned glass or two, but most of them— It occurred to Bannister that nothing in this world is more ungrateful than the mirror in a saloon, which, by reflecting their sodden faces, is forever reminding the poor creatures who have paid for it how very much they have paid for it.

"Why, there's the doc," exclaimed Michael, as though he had just laid eyes on him. He led the way over to him. "Hello, doc. Still at it?"

"Have ' drink," Lamoissant mumbled, with-

out glancing up. "Everybo'y have drink!" he shouted thickly.

"Yours the same, gents?" asked the bartender, polishing up the bar with a beer soaked rag.

"Everybo'y—hic—yes, 'n' I got money t' pay for it, too. Money t' burn!" With a lurch he thrust his hand into his trousers pocket, drew forth a crumpled bill, and slapped it on the bar. It was a hundred dollar bill. One end of it was charred. Lamoissant hazily realized that the bartender was noticing this.

"Wha' I tell yeh? Money t' burn. Yep!"

The bartender eyed him shrewdly. "Haven't you got anything smaller than this?" he asked, carefully folding the bill and putting it back into Lamoissant's hand. The old man shoved it back into his pocket and drew forth another crumpled ball.

"Money t' burn!" he repeated.

This time it was a twenty. And the edges of this bill, too, were charred.

"For the love o' heaven!" whispered Michael to Bannister while the bartender was taking the orders down the line, "An' where do ye suppose he got it all?"

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Bannister gripped Lamoissant's shoulder steadily. "I see by the papers," he said in a low, very distinct voice, "that our friend LeVey killed himself this morning."

The old man turned and shakily looked Bannister over from head to foot, as though trying to find some part of him that his bleared eyes could see clearly enough to recognize. He had to give it up. "Know nothin' 'bout it," he mumbled. "—Je ne sais rien." Then, perhaps because of some vague feeling that he was not receiving due credit for his discretion, he jabbed his forefinger knowingly into Bannister's ribs, and closed one eye in a grotesque wink. "If I knew half I told—hic—told half I knew—tha's it—told half I knew—" And then, with a sweeping wave of the hand, he suddenly collapsed.

Back in his rooms again, Bannister settled down to see if the later papers they had bought contained further news of LeVey's death.

LeVey, it was learned from employés in the *Chat* offices, had been alone in his sanctum almost an hour when he rang for Skeer just before shooting himself. His last visitor was a Dr. Lammersent, with whom he occasionally

had business of a confidential nature. A peculiar feature in connection with the tragedy, according to *The Evening American*, was the discovery that burned papers found in the fireplace were unquestionably bank notes of large denomination. Upon the blackened ashes of several of them the design was still—

Bannister sat up with a start. Lammer-sent? Burned bills? He grabbed his hat, and without stopping to call to Michael, rushed out the door, down the stairs, and back to the saloon where they had just left Lamoissant.



## CHAPTER XVI

**M**R. CARRUTHERS' funeral over, Jane and her mother closed the town house and went up to their country place, one of those sharp tongues of the Connecticut coast that stretch thirstily out into the Sound. Weather beaten gray rocks at the water's edge protected tall, dignified old trees that in turn sheltered a rambling old Colonial house which bore its electric lights and other modern contraptions with the calm resignation with which a patient old lady endures her first set of false teeth. There was an atmosphere of silent sympathy about it all that made the old place a restful one to those who had suffered.

Peggy O'Brian had joined the Carrutherses soon after their arrival.

"They really need me," she had written her beloved Denny. "It's all right to wear black because you're in mourning, but I don't want poor Jane to begin mourning merely because she is wearing black. Does that mean anything? I meant it to. . . . Mother Carruth-

ers really seems all broken up under the shock of it, and I think Jane is frightfully worried about her. I had no idea she really cared so much for him. I can't understand it. . . ."

Jane could have explained her mother's grief. She was not mourning the man who had just died; she was mourning the one whose death she had just heard of.

And Jane herself? Peggy could not understand Jane, either. She was so sad, so utterly dispirited. There had been the terrible strain with its natural reaction, of course. But there was something more. She seemed to be living in the shadow of some real grief.

One bright day Jane and Peggy were together on the rocks out on the farthest point of land. Jane, her lithe, slender body following the lines of greatest comfort on the cushions she had strewn about, was gazing listlessly out over the sun-jeweled water at the hazy silhouette of the Long Island shore across the Sound. Two or three little strands of her glorious red hair had yielded to the persistent wooing of the breeze and were gently moving in response to its caresses.

Peggy, her back propped up against a jagged rock, sat hugging her knees. For some min-

utes she had been watching Jane and wondering. Was it LeVey? Had Jane really cared for him after all? And Jones Bannister—Had Peggy been mistaken after all?

"Denny says," she remarked aloud, "that of course he has only known 'J' Bannister since he's been so frightfully in love, but he imagines he must be a very decent sort when he's sober."

Jane came out of her reverie with a start and turned to Peggy. "'J' in love?" she said more in surprise than in interrogation.

"Well, isn't he?" smiled Peggy with accusing eyes.

Jane shrugged and resumed her former survey of the glittering water. But the color in her cheeks belied her affectation of indifference.

"Jane, dear," pleaded Peggy, going over to her and laying her hand upon her arm, "I didn't mean to—but can't we trust each other any more? You used to tell me everything. And everybody knows how he loves you—even 'J' himself knows, which is remarkable in a man."

Jane smiled in spite of herself.

"Hasn't he told you, dear?" coaxed Peggy.

"Or were—or did you really care for—someone else?"

Jane, still gazing out over the water, slowly shook her head. "No, Peg, it wasn't he. For a while I thought—but—" With a sudden little gesture of surrender she turned toward Peggy. The old light of mischief kindled in her green eyes, like the fire in an opal that has suddenly found the sun. A smile quivered on the corners of her mouth. "What else was it?" she asked. "'J' Bannister? Well, as long as you're bound to find out in the end anyway, I suppose it will save us both a lot of worry and trouble if we get it over with now. No, Margaret Busybody O'Brian, Mr. Jones Bannister has not proposed marriage to me. He admitted that he was going to, but I asked him not to, and, like an officer and a gentleman, he didn't. Told me that if ever I needed him—and all that sort of thing. And now what? Next question, please?"

"I haven't time for any more just now," said Peggy, jumping to her feet. "It's just occurred to me that I must walk in to the village and telegraph. I haven't sent Denny a telegram for perfect ages. And if I don't send him one every now and then when there isn't

anything wrong, it scares the wits out of him to get one when there really is something the matter." Leaning over, she took Jane's face between her hands and impulsively kissed her on the forehead.

"No, thanks," she called back to some question of Jane's. "I'd really rather hoof it."

Peggy walked briskly, and in less than half an hour had covered the mile to the little railroad station. She seized the pile of telegraph blanks and addressed the top one to Mr. Jones Bannister:

"Can't you run up to-morrow and stay over Sunday. Dreadfully lonely."

She carefully counted the words. Eleven of them—even if they let "can't" go as one. But that would make it more convincing—Jane never thought of things like that. With which comforting reflection she boldly signed, "Jane Carruthers."

A second telegram, also addressed to Bannister, she signed with her own name. It read:

"A man could elope with his grandmother on a day like this."

She saved a word in revision by crossing out the "his"; it was really such glorious weather that it wouldn't matter much whose grandmother.

She paid for these and started to leave. But at the door her conscience pricked her. She had as much as told Jane that she was going to telegraph to Denny. She might just as well, and she could send this one collect.

"Do not be alarmed at this telegram," it ran. "Am all right."

When Peggy reached the house again, Jane was sitting on the porch, reading.

"Well, did you get your telegram off to Denny all right?"

"Yes. And, oh, Janey: I'm afraid I'll have to get back to town to-morrow on that early train," she said regretfully. "But you won't be lonely," she remembered, brightening up. "'J' is coming up in his car for over Sunday. And after he leaves perhaps I can get back—if you feel you really need me," she added rather doubtfully.

"Peggy! What do you mean? Have you been 'phoning 'J'?"

"No, dear. Telegraphing. I was afraid that if I 'phoned he might recognize my voice,

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and you see I had to sign your name to it to make sure of him."

"Do you mean to say—!" Jane sat upright, flashing indignation. "I—I—"

"No, you can't telegraph him that it wasn't you," surmised Peggy calmly. "I'd thought of that. If you did, you see, he'd know you'd told me everything he'd ever said about his coming if you needed him, and all that. I'm sorry, Jane, if— Are you *very* angry?" she pleaded demurely.

It was impossible to glare at Peggy successfully.

"Angry? I *hate* you!" Jane told her affectionately, whereupon they both broke into laughter and went upstairs together to get ready for dinner.

Peggy left her packing until morning, but managed to get all the little details that make up the intricate mosaic of a woman's luggage together in time to catch her train.

Jane spent much of the remainder of the day on the porch with a magazine, her ears expectantly alert for the sound of a certain motor turning into the driveway. But when, along toward evening, Bannister did draw up in front of the house, she was nowhere to be

found, and it fell upon Mrs. Carruthers to welcome him alone.

"It's very good to see you," she told him when he came down from his room, refreshed and flannel-suited. "I don't know where Jane can be. She was about the house just a minute ago." She led the way to the veranda facing the Sound, and glanced through the trees out toward the point. "You may find her out on the rocks."

He merely glanced in the direction indicated.

"And how is she? And you?" He arranged the cushions in Mrs. Carruthers' chair and seated himself on the edge of the veranda against one of the pillars. Their conversation was desultory. From time to time, when he thought she was not looking, he stole a questioning glance at her. Did *she* know? he wondered.

"You *have* had a hard time of it," he said after a thoughtful pause. "And Jane—Poor Jane! With her it has been doubly hard." He was gazing off through the trees. "Maurice LeVey—" He did not finish.

"Jane did not love Maurice LeVey," she



told him with sudden understanding. "It was not that. But *he* loved *her*. And when he—was found, he had her letter telling him—how impossible it was. She feels—she cannot help feeling that—no matter what he was—it was because of her that he—"

Bannister straightened up. "But LeVey did not kill himself," he blurted out. "Jane must not feel— Why, LeVey was murdered!"

Her eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Murdered!" she whispered. "But—"

"Yes—murdered." He got up and drew a chair close to hers. "I have said nothing about it before, for the man who killed him is now dead himself, and I thought it would be better—that it made no difference now. His name was Lamoissant."

"Lamoissant!" she murmured. "The old doctor who attended him in New Orleans—who—" She stopped.

He regarded her questioningly. "You know, then?" he asked gently.

She saw that he knew, and nodded. "He told me just before the end came. He—he was repentant. And he really cared, I think. Our marriage in the church after he came up—our second marriage, I thought then—he

kept repeating that I was his wife. But you—how did *you* learn?"

Bannister told her of Michael's chancing upon Lamoissant and of his own meetings with him later. "And do you remember when I first saw the portrait in your library, and you asked me if I could tell which was—Mr. Carruthers? And I picked—his brother? Something Lamoissant said caused that to flash across my mind. 'Twas then I first suspected." Then, after a pause: "Does Jane know about—her father?"

"Yes. Jane knows."

For several moments Mrs. Carruthers reflected upon his story in silence. "And you say this Lamoissant killed him? You are sure?"

"Positive." He told her of the charred bills in the saloon and of his learning that Lamoissant had been LeVey's last visitor. "When I read that I rushed back to find him, but he had already been taken to the hospital. Alcoholism. And later pneumonia. Before he died he confessed to me that he had gone to demand money; that in some mad impulse he had burnt it and shot LeVey. My first thought was to tell the police. Then it oc-

curred to me that if they should begin to investigate— And what good could come of it?"

"I understand," she said simply. "I am grateful."

"One thing I can't figure out," he mused. "Lamoissant had been gone an hour, they said, when they heard the bell that summoned them. What rang that bell? I asked Lamoissant, but he"—with a shrug—"could give no explanation. He knew only that he had done—what he had done."

But Mrs. Carruthers was thinking of her daughter.

"Jane has been suffering all the agonies of remorse," she said. "She feels that he killed himself because of her. You will tell her?" She laid her hand appealingly on his. "You will find her now, and tell her?"

She gave his hand a gentle pressure that was like a benediction.

He found Jane sitting in the shelter of a rock, gazing dreamily across the little inlet of rich red wine that Nature was offering as a stirrup-cup to the departing sun over on the mainland. At the sound of his footstep she

turned. A little confused, she arose to greet him.

For a few seconds neither spoke.

"Jane, I have something to tell you."

The crimson of the water seemed faintly reflected on her cheek.

He told her of Lamoissant and of the murder of LeVey. It was not what she had expected him to tell. She was vaguely disappointed in escaping what she had dreaded. She thanked him, and turned again to the sunset.

"And Jane—" He paused in slight confusion.

"Yes?"

"Once, do you remember, you asked me if I were going to propose, and I said that I was." He took a step toward her. "Have—have I been mistaken, Jane?"

She faced him squarely and looked into his eyes. What she saw there brought back the mischievous Jane of old. "I hope not, 'J.' *Have* you?" And then she went suddenly out of mourning in a glorious blush.

Half an hour later Peggy, in her house in New York, hung up the telephone receiver and

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turned to Denny. "Well, thank heaven that's over," she told him with a sigh of relief. "Now I'll have time to choose the new papers for the second floor."

THE END

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